

MARCO POLO'S CHINA

A Venetian in the realm of Khubilai Khan

Stephen G. Haw

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Marco Polo's famous book about his journey to China, written in 1298, continues to be a subject of considerable controversy. One recent work on the subject argues that Marco Polo never went to China at all, and other scholars have pointed out apparent mistakes and important omissions in Marco's writings, including his failure to mention the Great Wall, and his apparently erroneous description of the course of the Yellow River.

This book re-examines Marco Polo's writings. The main arguments against his credibility have been negative, concentrating on things that it is argued he should have seen and noted but did not. The most serious of these supposed omissions are generally said to be his failure to describe the Chinese writing system, tea, foot-binding and the Great Wall of China. But the author argues that what he does mention is impressive and argues strongly for his veracity. For instance, Marco describes the new capital city of Dadu built for Khubilai Khan on the site of modern Beijing. He also notes that this new city was linked to the Yangtze River by canals. The building of Dadu only began during the 1260s and the canal system linking it to the River was not completed until after 1290, a few years before Marco dictated his account to Rustichello of Pisa. If the great explorer was relying on sources other than personal experience, then they were clearly very up-to-date. This book clarifies Marco Polo's itineraries in China and proposes several new identifications of places mentioned, in addition to elucidating many of his observations, especially those of plants and animals. The research has relied extensively on original Chinese sources and is supplemented by the author's wide knowledge of China.

Marco Polo's China presents a convincing argument and concludes that his work is an accurate, important and useful source from an extraordinary period of Chinese history.

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Introduction: Lies or truth?

Marco Polo and his book have for a long time excited controversy. Writing only a few years after Marco's death, Jacopo d'Acqui related how, when he was on his deathbed, Marco was asked to retract everything in his book that was not factual, but retorted that 'he had not told one half of what he had really seen' (Larner 1999: 115; MP/Yule-Cordier: i, *54*). Although this must surely have been absolutely true, doubts about his veracity persisted. At some periods, he seems to have been generally believed, while at others he was seriously questioned. His failure to mention the Great Wall of China began to attract adverse comment from about the middle of the seventeenth century and has continued to raise doubts ever since. It has been suggested that Marco never went to China at all or that, if he did, he never went beyond Khanbalikh (modern Beijing). Several heavily annotated editions of Marco Polo's book (often called *The Travels*, though originally entitled *The Description of the World*) have been produced at various periods and there is an extensive literature about him. Yet much remains obscure. Many of the places that he mentions have remained unidentified or very uncertainly identified. Alongside his supposed omissions, it is these difficulties with his place-names that seem to have given rise to the greatest suspicions about his account. It was because so many unresolved questions about Marco and his book still existed that I first began my researches in this area of study.

Many of the criticisms of Marco Polo have been highly ill-informed and commonly totally anachronistic. During the seventeenth century, complaints were voiced against him because he ignored latitude and longitude! At about the same time, he was also condemned for stating that paper money existed in China under the Mongols, although this was, of course, quite correct. In the middle of the eighteenth century, it was first suggested that he might never have visited China at all. This was despite the fact that, at that period, European knowledge of China was scarcely more than minimal, so that this suggestion was fundamentally based on ignorance. Marco also began to be attacked because his book was 'papist', although again this should hardly have been surprising as he lived long before Martin Luther (Larner 1999: 173–5). This kind of severely anachronistic approach to Marco and his book was typical not only of his critics, but also of his admirers. Marsden

and Yule, who produced what were, for their time, excellent annotated editions of Marco's book, relied very heavily on contemporary knowledge of the geography of China, although there had been many changes since the thirteenth century. Neither of them, of course, was able to read original Chinese sources.

It is, indeed, very difficult for any one scholar to attempt a critical study of Marco Polo and his book. To cover the subject comprehensively would require the knowledge of several Asian languages, besides competence in Latin as well as medieval Romance languages. The substantial part of Marco's book dealing with the dominions of the Great Khan Khubilai in the Far East is, however, among the most important sections of the book. It is fundamental to its understanding, for if Marco is a genuine and reliable witness of China under Mongol rule, then his general veracity must be accepted. As a student of Chinese who has travelled extensively in China himself, I have felt reasonably competent to deal with this limited part of the topic. Researches in Chinese sources quite quickly showed that it was possible to do much better in confirming Marco's accuracy than previously. I have succeeded in identifying with certainty or near certainty all but a very few of the places within the Yuan empire that Marco mentions. I have also been able to confirm a number of statements in his book that have, until now, been considered dubious or wrong. As one of my particular areas of interest is the natural history of China, especially its flora, I offer considerable elucidation of Marco's many observations regarding plants and animals. These are significant, as other foreign visitors to China at about the same period paid little attention to such things. Almost certainly, therefore, Marco must have acquired information of this kind personally.

Marco lived an extraordinary life, for he left Venice when he was only some 17 years old and did not return until 24 years later, at the age of about 41 or 42. By then, he had lived most of his life as a foreigner in East Asia. He must have felt as much a foreigner in Venice after so long. No doubt he was happy to recount tales of his adventures, to anyone who would listen, and to see them set down in writing. For him, perhaps, the book was a link to his former life at the court of the Great Khan, a way to hold on to memories of something that he had lost forever. For us today, it is a fascinating glimpse into a remarkable period of history. This book is a complete reassessment of Marco's account of China. It argues that by far the greater part of what he says is simply too accurate to be based upon anything other than first-hand knowledge. It also argues that Marco's account is exactly right for the period when he claimed to be in the empire of Khubilai Khan. It would have been very hard for anyone not talking from personal experience to have avoided serious anachronisms. This is especially true of such projects as the Grand Canal, much of which was constructed only while Marco was actually in China. If he had been relying on others for his information, then the knowledge that they passed on to him must have been very recently acquired. Indeed, during the process of researching this book,

I have been constantly struck by the fact that a very large part of Marco's account of the Yuan empire fits more or less exactly with accounts in Chinese sources. If Marco was a liar, then he must have been an implausibly meticulous one.

It has also seemed worthwhile to add yet another book to the large volume of literature about Marco Polo, because only quite a small contribution has so far been made by scholars of Chinese studies. A great deal has been written about Marco by, among others, historians of medieval Europe, specialists in studies of Western and Central Asia and even authorities on Romance linguistics. One of Marco's greatest commentators, whose edition of the book and copious notes are still useful today, was Sir Henry Yule. Yule was a military officer with a long and distinguished career in India who had, however, no personal experience of China. Even the work of the Chinese scholar, Henri Cordier, on the third edition of Yule's text, and his supplementary volume of notes (MP/Yule-Cordier), could not entirely remedy this deficiency. Indeed, as recently as 1999, it could still be said that the first annotated edition of Marco's text to be produced by a Chinese specialist, that of M. G. Pauthier published in 1865 (MP/Pauthier), was 'valuable for use of Chinese sources' (Larner 1999: 6). This is also despite the fact that extensive *Notes on Marco Polo* by the great Orientalist, Paul Pelliot, were published during the 1950s and 1960s (Pelliot 1959–63). These might well have been more useful if they had been completed by Pelliot himself. Unfortunately, they were not, but were edited for publication after his death by Louis Hambis. Parts of them seem to have been lost and they are often apparently unfinished. They nevertheless seem to have long been regarded as virtually 'the last word' on Marco's book and are perhaps a major reason why scholars of Chinese studies have largely neglected Marco during the past few decades. This is not to say that no useful contributions have been published. Very important studies have been produced by Thomas Allsen and Igor de Rachewiltz, for example (Allsen 2000; De Rachewiltz 1997, 1998). There have, however, been few attempts during the last forty years at anything approaching a comprehensive reassessment of Marco Polo's account of the Yuan empire. A major exception is Frances Wood's *Did Marco Polo go to China?* (Wood 1995). Dr Wood set out to prove that Marco had never been anywhere near China, a point of view with which, for reasons that will become clear later in this book, I very strongly disagree. In fact, although I have of course looked through Pelliot's *Notes* and other similar works, I have to a great extent worked directly with Chinese sources.

It has often been remarked that Marco's book is very impersonal. Little of Marco himself appears anywhere in it. He is not even very forthcoming about his status in the Yuan empire. Some versions of the text include the claim that, for three years, he was governor in Yangzhou, possibly a provincial governor and (in Ramusio's version of the book) holding the post as substitute for someone else. This claim is completely omitted from several important manuscripts, however, while others merely say that he was resident

in Yangzhou for three years. All that is reported about the rest of the long period during which Marco was in China is that he acted as some kind of emissary of Khubilai Khan, being sent on various unspecified missions that involved travelling as far afield as India, and that the Khan esteemed him highly. There has been much speculation about what his exact position in the empire might have been. On the strength of his frequent mentions of salt, it has been suggested that he perhaps held a post in the government salt administration (the salt trade was a government monopoly in China). It has also been supposed that, as he came from a mercantile family, he might have acted as merchant partner of some Mongol noble, in the system known as ortakh. There is, however, scant evidence for either of these postulations. I have ventured in this book to put forward another hypothesis, one for which, it seems to me, there is slightly more basis. My suggestion is that Marco's role under Khubilai Khan was primarily military. There is some evidence to suggest that he may have been a 'Mongol knight', which I interpret to mean that he was a keshigten, a member of Khubilai Khan's personal bodyguard. I also suggest that Marco may well have been married while in China. Nothing would have been more natural than for the Great Khan to press this young, unattached man to marry. He may well have presented Marco with a bride, whom it would have been very difficult indeed to refuse. After his return to Europe, Marco would very likely have felt that it was best to maintain silence regarding both these things. Certainly his marriage would have been a problem, at a period when divorce was, at best, extremely hard to obtain.

I have limited my discussion of Marco's book principally to the parts of it that deal with the empire of the Great Khan, that is, the Yuan empire, as it is called in Chinese sources. It was Khubilai Khan who took the Chinese title of Yuan for the Mongol dynasty in 1272. The empire included regions that are no longer part of China, especially in South-east Asia. I have also dealt with places that are currently within the borders of the People's Republic of China but were not directly under Yuan control, such as towns in what is now south-west Xinjiang. Thus, I have begun to deal in detail with Marco's itineraries at the point where he descends from the Pamir to Kashgar and have ended when he leaves Mangi (MP/Latham: 80–140; MP/Hambis: 129–388). Outside of this, I have covered only a few topics in any depth. An example is Marco's account of Japan (MP/Latham: 243–8; MP/Hambis: 397–404). However, although I have dealt in detail with all the places on Marco's itineraries within the Yuan empire, I have not attempted to identify every place-name that he gives. When he mentions a place more or less in isolation, without any good indication of its approximate location, I have not felt it to be very profitable to attempt to improve on previous commentators' work. For example, Marco states that among the rebels who supported Nayan were men of four provinces: Ciorcia, Cauli, Barscol and Sichintingiu (MP/Latham: 118; MP/Hambis: 203). The first two have been commonly, and very probably correctly, identified with Jurchen and Korea

(Gaoli, Koryo). Barscol looks like Barskul, now Barkol (Allsen 1983: 259), although this place is in eastern Xinjiang, very far from Nayan's territory. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that he may have been joined by forces from this region. Without any indication of where Barscol may have been, no identification can ever be much more than a reasonable guess. Sichintingiu is even more problematic. My own surmise would be that it is a corrupted version of Xijing Datongfu. Such virtual guesswork does not seem to me to serve any very useful purpose, however.

A major problem for anyone writing about China under Mongol rule is how to transliterate Chinese and Mongolian words into Latin script. There seems to be no universally accepted system for the transliteration of Mongolian. In the case of names and titles, the situation is further complicated by the fact that Turkic and Persian versions also existed and have been much used in Western literature. The great variation in the forms of the title Chinggis Khan is an obvious example. There is also the question of avoiding possible confusion in the pronunciation of Chinese and Mongolian words, through use of the same letter with different values in the transliteration of the two languages. Thus, I have avoided the use of the letter 'q' in transliterating Mongolian, because it would represent a sound very different from that represented by 'q' in the system that I have used for the transliteration of Chinese. It also seems to me that words like 'khan' are too familiar to Westerners to be replaced by such a form as 'qan'. I have, therefore, used 'kh' rather than 'q'. I have also preferred to avoid, as far as possible, the use of apostrophes in transliteration and therefore have used 'g' (between front vowels) and 'gh' (between back vowels) in Mongolian words. Thus, I have used the form 'Boghorchu' rather than 'Bo'orchu', for example. It should be noted, however, that 'g' and 'gh' seem often to have been not or scarcely pronounced, at least during Marco's time. In Chinese, the Mongolian word 'keshig' is transcribed as 'qiexue'. The second syllable never had a final 'g'. It was formerly pronounced 'siät' (Karlgren 1964: 89 [289e]). By the Yuan period the final 't' must have been replaced by a glottal stop (this used to be called 'the fifth tone', but no longer exists in Modern Standard Chinese). Similarly, Marco also omits the 'g', writing 'quesitan' for 'keshigten'.

I have used the Pinyin system for the transliteration of Chinese. It is sometimes alleged that the older Wade-Giles system is phonetically superior to Pinyin, but this does not seem to me to be true. Certainly some letters are used in Pinyin to represent sounds that they would not normally represent in the great majority of European languages. However, once familiarity with the system has been achieved, this ceases to be a problem. Wade-Giles has the great disadvantage of sometimes using the same transliteration for entirely different Chinese sounds. Thus, the third reign-period of the Ming dynasty is written 'Yung-lo' in Wade-Giles, 'Yongle' in Pinyin. Wade-Giles also uses 'lo' at the beginning of the name of the city, 'Lo-yang', although the sound represented is quite different. The Pinyin equivalent is 'Luoyang'.

The use of apostrophes in Wade-Giles to represent aspiration of initial consonants also seems to me to be undesirable. Others have agreed, sometimes even devising their own variants of the system to avoid this usage. Thus, in the great work *Science and Civilisation in China*, Joseph Needham and his collaborators used a modified form of Wade-Giles, using 'h' to replace the apostrophe. Unfortunately, this gives rise to such anomalies as 'th' pronounced, not as 'th' usually is in English, but as an aspirated 't'. In any case, I have preferred not to attempt to devise my own personal system for transliterating Chinese, which would only be likely to create confusion. Of course, every system of transliteration of Chinese has some drawbacks, so that, in the final analysis, the system chosen is at least partly dependent on personal prejudice. Pinyin, however, has the advantage of being an international system devised and used by the Chinese themselves. It must be noted that it represents the current pronunciation of Chinese words, in the standard version of the Chinese language (Putonghua or Modern Standard Chinese). Chinese would have been pronounced somewhat differently during the thirteenth century. Occasionally, I have felt it to be useful to indicate an earlier pronunciation of Chinese. In such cases, I have followed Karlgren's transcriptions of the sounds of Ancient Chinese (Karlgren 1964). This actually represents a pronunciation dating from well before Marco's time (early seventh century), but is at least useful in indicating the former existence of final consonants and changes in the values of initial sounds. I have sometimes taken the liberty of modifying Karlgren's transcriptions, as he uses letters and signs not in general use. When referring to Karlgren, I have cited not only page numbers but also the reference numbers and letters that he assigned to the Chinese characters in question. I have avoided as far as possible the use of foreign words from languages other than Mongolian and Chinese. When it has been necessary to do so, I have followed what seemed to me to be standard orthography. Some explanation is needed of my use of two different forms of the name 'Uighur' or 'Uygur'. I have used the former spelling when referring to the Uighurs of the period of the Yuan dynasty and before and the latter for the modern Uygurs, who may not be absolutely identical peoples.

There is very considerable variation in the spellings of names and other words in the many variants of Marco Polo's text. I have throughout preferred the versions given in Louis Hambis's edition of *The Description of the World*, which is a French version of the text put together by Moule and Pelliot from all the major variants of the book (MP/Hambis). Of the spellings used in modern published editions of the book, Hambis's seem to be the nearest to Marco's original intention. His French text also seems to reflect the early versions of the book most closely, partly because it is in French rather than English, and thus more similar to whatever the original language of the text may have been (which was certainly either a Romance language or possibly, at least in part, Latin), and partly because he seems to have made a deliberate attempt to preserve Marco's turn of phrase, even if

this is now archaic. This version of the book also has the advantage of still being readily available today, while Moule and Pelliot's English edition is hard to find outside major libraries. I have usually also given all variant spellings that seem to me to be significant. When I have quoted from Marco Polo's book, I have used the English translation by Ronald Latham (MP/Latham), which is also still readily available and usually as good as any other. I have normally given references to the texts both of Latham and of Hambis.

I have made extensive use of the official Chinese history of the Yuan dynasty, the *Yuan Shi* (YS). Because of the defects in this important work, a new version of the history was prepared and published during the early twentieth century. I have scarcely made any reference to this *Xin Yuan Shi* (XYS), however. This is because some of the works which were used in its preparation may have been influenced by Marco Polo's book. I did not want to justify Marco by reference to a text which might, ultimately, have derived from Marco. All quoted translations from Chinese are my own.

In dealing with the plants and animals mentioned by Marco, I have given scientific Latin names whenever possible. This is essential to avoid any possibility of confusion, as English names are often used very much more loosely. In any case, no generally accepted English names exist for many plant species from eastern Asia. It is unfortunately a fact that the same botanical Latin name has sometimes been given to different plants by different botanists. Problems of this kind seem to be less common in zoology, but are by no means non-existent. I have therefore also given the author of every Latin name, frequently in an accepted abbreviated form, after all names except those of birds, where this practice appears to be extremely rare.

All dates in this book are CE (AD) except where indicated. Where necessary, I have preferred to use BCE rather than BC.

1 China before the Mongol conquest

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, on the eve of the Mongol invasions, the area that is today China was not a single country. Histories of China naturally tend to concentrate on the Chinese dynasties, those regarded as the major repositories of Chinese tradition. States founded by non-Chinese peoples, that controlled only part of what is now China, have often been more or less overlooked, mentioned only when they directly affected the 'principal', Chinese states. Thus, the Chinese Song dynasty has usually been given pre-eminence in accounts of China immediately before the Mongol conquest. Frequently, the most that has been noted has been that, after 1126, north and south China were divided, with the north controlled by the alien Jin dynasty and the south by the Song.[1] This emphasis has begun to shift recently, with more studies on the so-called 'barbarian' states, but a more balanced view has still not been entirely achieved. In the year 1200, the Song empire was one of no less than six major states controlling large areas of China. In the south-west was the kingdom of Dali, centred on what is now the province of Yunnan and including also parts of Sichuan province and northern Myanmar (Burma). It was the successor to the state of Nanzhao, which had been in existence since the eighth century. Southern China, from the Sichuan Basin eastwards to the coast, was controlled by the Southern Song dynasty. Most of north China formed part of the empire of the Jin dynasty, whose rulers were Jurchens from the north-east. They were the ancestors of the later Manchus, who founded the Qing dynasty, the last imperial dynasty to rule over China. Their empire also included much of today's Inner Mongolia and almost all of what later came to be called Manchuria, as well as areas to the north-east that are now part of Russia. In the north-west lay the Xi Xia or Tangut kingdom, ruling over most of today's Gansu province and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, as well as a large part of western Inner Mongolia. South of this was Tibet, including not only today's Autonomous Region of Tibet but also Qinghai province and western Sichuan. At this time, Tibet was not united. It included the principalities of the Tufan or Tubo,[2] which generally maintained relations of some kind with China (Petech 1983: 173–5). Modern Xinjiang formed a large portion of the Western Liao or Karakhitay empire, which also controlled

parts of Central Asia further to the west. The ruling dynasty came from the Khitan people, who had earlier controlled the area of Manchuria, most of Mongolia and the east of north China to south of modern Beijing. It is instructive to note that the area of China including and surrounding this city, which has been the Chinese capital for all but a few decades since 1264, was ruled by non-Chinese dynasties for almost the whole of the period from the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907 until 1368. It became part of the empire of the Song dynasty for less than three years. From 913 until 926 it was controlled by Li Cunxu, a Shatuo Turk. He and his successors ruled as emperors of the Later Tang dynasty from 923 until 936. It was then held successively by the Khitans, the Jurchens and the Mongols.[3]

The Khitans were probably closely related to the Mongols, speaking a similar language (Needham 1954: 130; Morgan 1986: 47). They are first mentioned in Chinese history during the fifth century (Ledyard 1983: 320) and became powerful and prominent after the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907. Several of the states of the Five Dynasties period were to a greater or lesser extent under Khitan dominion: the Later Jin dynasty was established in northern China in 936 with their support (Wang 1963: 189–90). In return, they were given the 'sixteen prefectures' of north-eastern China. In 938, the town of Youzhou (modern Beijing) became their Southern Capital (Nanjing, called Yanjing after 1012). They formally declared their Great Liao dynasty in 947 (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 207–213, 592). At this time, they in fact controlled the greater part of northern China for several months, but were unable to maintain this control for lack of military resources and because of the sudden death of their emperor (Wang 1963: 192–4). They held onto the 'sixteen prefectures', however. The Liao dynasty was to last for almost two centuries, before the Khitans were displaced by the Jurchens in 1125. After their defeat by the Jurchens in the east, some of the Khitans moved westwards, under the leadership of a member of the Liao royal family, Yelü Dashi, and began to create a new empire. They conquered Kashgar and Khotan (both in modern Xinjiang) by 1129 and during the next dozen years extended their rule westwards to the area known as Mawara'n-nahr or Transoxania. In 1141, in a battle near Samarkand, they defeated the Saljuk Turks and destroyed their power in Central Asia. It was probably this battle, when the Muslim Saljuks were defeated by an army which included at least a substantial number of Nestorian and Jacobite Christians, that gave rise to the legend of Prester John in Europe (Morgan 1986: 48–9; Christian 1998: 378–9). This new Khitan empire was called Karakhitay or, in Chinese, Western Liao. It is extremely interesting because of the complex mix of peoples and influences which it encompassed. Chinese was the main administrative language, but Persian and Uighur Turkish were also used officially. The population included Chinese, Khitans, Persians, Uighurs and other Turkic peoples, whose beliefs were equally varied. The major religions of the empire were Buddhism, Islam, Nestorian and Jacobite Christianity and Manichaeism (Morgan 1986: 49; Christian 1998: 378).



Figure 1.1 China in the early 1200s, showing approximate boundaries between the states of the period. The broken line indicates the borders of China today.

In about 1200, the Karakhitay empire extended from Hami (Khamil) in the east almost to the Aral Sea in the west. It included all of modern Xinjiang except for the Altay area, the whole of the Ili region to the southern shores of Lake Balkhash and the area around Samarkand, which became Hezhong prefecture (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 51). It was, however, beginning to feel the adverse effects of pressure from neighbouring powers. In 1209, the Uighurs of Turfan murdered their Karakhitay supervisor in Khara Khojo (Gaochang) and offered their submission to the Mongols (Allsen 1983: 246). In the following year, the Khwarazm Shah's armies defeated the Karakhitay near Talas (at or near modern Dzhambul). During the next two years, Khwarazm took most of the western half of the Karakhitay empire, seizing and plundering Samarkand in 1212 (Christian 1998: 379). The former Liao royal family had already been deposed. In 1204, Chinggis Khan had attacked and defeated the Naimans, a major Turko-Mongol tribe of western Mongolia. Küchlüg, son of the Naiman ruler, escaped with many followers and eventually entered the Karakhitay empire, where he was well received. He proved an ungrateful guest, staging a coup against the Western Liao emperor in 1211 and taking the throne himself (Christian 1998: 394). He had been raised as a Nestorian Christian, but converted to Buddhism and persecuted Islam. This was a very short-sighted policy, since many of his subjects in the empire that he had seized were Muslims. When the Mongols invaded his domains in 1218, they were generally welcomed by the populace. Küchlüg was forced to flee and was hunted down and killed (Morgan 1986: 60–1, 67).

The Khitans were militarily powerful. During the eleventh century, they were able successfully to demand payment from the Song empire in return for peace (Tao 1983: 68–9). The government of the Liao state was heavily influenced by Chinese practices, but the Khitans resisted assimilation to Chinese culture to a remarkable degree (Christian 1998: 378). There was probably some internal tension among the Khitans (as later among the Mongols) between those who wished to retain their old lifestyle and those who were happy to accept Chinese ways. This is reflected by the fact that the Khitans officially changed the title of their dynasty in 983 from Liao back to Khitan, but in 1066 reversed this change. Since their empire included vast tracts of land in which Chinese influence had never been more than slight and only a small area of traditionally Chinese territory, it was comparatively easy for them to hold on to their distinct identity. Their principal capital, Shangjing, was near today's Bairin Left Banner in Inner Mongolia. Even in the traditionally Chinese areas of their empire, such as the 'sixteen prefectures', they did not necessarily lose their Khitan identity. Indeed, it was not uncommon for ethnic Chinese to imitate the Khitans, in dress, hairstyle and customs (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 250–2). This is an important point, for it has commonly been assumed that the Chinese tended always to assimilate their conquerors. In fact, however, influences were often bidirectional.

The Khitans had a significant influence on the later Mongol empire. In Chinese histories, great prominence is given to the career of Yelü Chucai (1190–1244), a descendant of the Khitan royal family who served as an official of the Jurchen Jin empire. He was in Yanjing in 1215 when it fell to the Mongols and subsequently became an adviser to Chinggis Khan and then to his son and successor Ögödei (ruled 1229–41). He is credited with great influence on the development of the Mongol system of government, strongly advocating Confucian principles (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 324). It is said that he dissuaded the Mongols from massacring the entire population of northern China, so that the land could be used to pasture Mongol animals, by pointing out that it would be much more profitable to leave the people alive and tax them (Morgan 1986: 74). His advice was not always heeded, however. He was unable to persuade Ögödei to reinstate the Chinese system of examination for the bureaucracy, for example (no examinations were held until 1315), nor to moderate taxation of the northern Chinese (Morgan 1986: 102–3, 111). Nevertheless, it is clear that he was very influential. It is likely that the influence of the Khitans on the formation of the Mongol state also arrived by other routes. The Karakhitay empire was the first major state to fall to the Mongols, and many of its people submitted more or less voluntarily. Karakhitay institutions had been devised to suit a ruling group with close affinities with the Mongols, who were masters of a mix of different peoples with different ways of life. There could hardly have been a better model for the Mongols to follow. There is evidence of considerable continuity between Karakhitay and Mongol government practices (Morgan 1986: 49–50, 107).

The Tanguts, known in Chinese as Dangxiang or Dangxiang Qiang, were a people who seem probably to have originated in the borderlands between eastern Tibet and western China. It is likely that they migrated eastwards and submitted to the Chinese to avoid subordination to the Tibetans. They were reportedly settled by the Chinese in the Ordos region, within the great bend of the Yellow River, during the early Tang dynasty (Beckwith 1993: 150n; Dunnell 1996: 3). Their language was for a long time mysterious. It became extinct and has even yet not been fully reconstructed. It is possible now to translate inscriptions in the Tangut script, but the exact pronunciation of the Tangut language is unclear. It was undoubtedly related to Tibetan, but may have been closer to the language of the modern Qiang people, whose origins seem to have been similar to those of the Dangxiang Qiang. It has been suggested that the modern language most closely related to Tangut is Ersu or Tosu, a member of the Qiangic group of languages (Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus 2004). The rise of a Tangut kingdom began during the late tenth century, when Li Jiqian (963–1004) created a semi-independent state in the Ordos region. He submitted to the Khitans and was given a princess in marriage. In 990, the Khitan emperor conferred upon him the title of King of the State of Xia. The next year, however, he offered submission to the Song empire, but was soon fighting Song forces to

expand the area under his control. In 1002, he took Lingzhou on the Yellow River (near modern Lingwu in Ningxia) from Song. The following year, he led his forces to attack Xiliangfu or Liangzhou (Wuwei in Gansu). He was wounded in the fighting and died of his wounds in 1004. His son, Li Deming, succeeded him and also played off Song against the Khitans. In 1006, he was given the title of Prince (or King; Chinese 'Wang') of Xiping by the Song emperor, while in 1010 he was made, like his father, King of the State of Xia by the Khitans. In 1028, his son Yuanhao took Xiliangfu again. He then attacked and seized Ganzhou (now Zhangye in Gansu), further to the north-west, from the Uighurs, who at this time controlled what is now north-west Gansu (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 307; Petech 1983: 177; Dunnell 1996: xxi).

Yuanhao continued to expand the Tangut state and in 1038 declared himself emperor of Great Xia (later commonly called Xi Xia). He embarked upon war against the Song empire, in which he had considerable success, making peace with Song in 1044 on favourable terms. Annual gifts from Song to Xia were to include 50,000 Chinese ounces (liang) of silver and 20,000 catties (jin) of tea. In the same year, he defeated a Khitan attack upon Xia (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 307–8). By the time of his death in 1048, the Xia state was firmly established. Although its borders changed somewhat during the next 180 years, it survived all vicissitudes, including the period of the overthrow of the Khitans by the Jurchens and their subsequent conquest of north China from Song. In the 1140s, peaceful relations were established with the Jurchen Jin dynasty. Xia was, however, an early victim of the Mongol conquests, suffering attacks from 1205 and total conquest by 1227 (Dunnell 1996: xxii–v). Xia was a profoundly Buddhist state. Buddhist influences reached the Mongols from many directions, but the conquest of the Tanguts during the earliest Mongol campaigns outside Mongolia must have made a significant contribution to those influences.

The far south-west of China (modern Yunnan province) was well removed from the main centres of early development of Chinese culture. It was not brought within the regular administration of the Chinese empire until 109 BCE, when the prefecture (jun) of Yizhou was established (Rock 1947: 8). Its seat of government was near modern Jinning, at the southern end of the Dian Chi lake. Subsequently, Chinese power in the area ebbed and flowed, the extent of any Chinese control varying considerably over time. During the second half of the seventh century, the Tang dynasty tried to strengthen its grip on the area, but its policies resulted in the production of a regional power which eventually became strong enough to throw off Tang overlordship. In the 730s, the Nanzhao kingdom brought much of today's Yunnan under its control. In 738, the Tang emperor bestowed the title of King of Yunnan (Yunnan Wang) on the Nanzhao ruler. The rise of the power of the Tibetans at the same period offered Nanzhao some choice of allegiance. During the early 750s, Nanzhao was able, with Tibetan

assistance, to defeat three attempts at invasion by Tang armies. Thereafter, Nanzhao expanded the area under its control and successfully maintained its more or less autonomous status until the early 900s (You Zhong 1980: 89–90). In 902, the Nanzhao ruling family was overthrown by a minister. A series of similar coups occurred during the following 35 years, until power was taken by Duan Siping. He established the Kingdom of Dali, which was to endure until the Mongol conquests (Rock 1947: 30n, 59; You Zhong 1980: 91–2). The Nanzhao kingdom and its successors maintained their independent existence for more than five hundred years.

The Dali kingdom ruled over a variety of peoples, but the two major groups are referred to in Chinese sources as Bai Man and Wu Man, that is, White and Black Southern 'Barbarians'. These names cannot necessarily be exactly equated with any modern groups of peoples, but it seems highly likely that, broadly speaking, the Bai Man were ancestral to the modern Bai ethnic group and the Wu Man to the modern Yi (often called Lolos in the recent past). The kings of Nanzhao came from the Wu Man, though many of the ministers of the state were Bai Man. After the overthrow of the Nanzhao dynasty, the rulers of the successor states, including the Kingdom of Dali, were Bai Man (some of them possibly descended from Chinese immigrants to the region who had become assimilated to the Bai Man). Their subjects included many Wu Man (You Zhong 1980: 92–3). The Bai Man were more heavily influenced by Chinese culture than the Wu Man. Chinese script was used for records during the periods of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms. The Dehua stele, set up in 766 and still standing near modern Dali, bears long inscriptions on both sides in Chinese, totalling more than five thousand characters (Li Kunsheng 1981: 17). Although animism and shamanism were widespread and have remained so until modern times (Wang Yunhui *et al.* (eds) 1983: 206), Buddhism was prominent in the religious life of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms. The three pagodas of the Chongsheng Temple, just north of the present town of Dali, are of uncertain date but have existed since at least as early as the first half of the ninth century (Rock 1947: 31n; Guojia Wenwu Shiye Guanliju (ed.) 1981: 988). Duan Siping strongly favoured Buddhism. He is said to have founded many temples and had numerous Buddhist statues cast. A school of Vajrayana (Esoteric or Tantric) Buddhism was most influential in the Kingdom of Dali. There were contacts between Buddhists in Dali, India and Myanmar. The importance of Buddhism in the region persisted after the Mongol conquest (Li Kunsheng 1981: 37–8). The original capital city of the Nanzhao state was at Taihecheng (Rock 1947: 30n; Li Kunsheng 1981: 10). The remains of this town lie a short distance south of present-day Dali (confusingly, the city formerly called Xiaguan is now Dali Municipality, but the smaller town of old Dali still exists further north and is the Dali referred to here). The capital was moved to roughly the present site of Dali in 779 (Li Kunsheng 1981: 13). In the early 800s, it was called the Western Capital, Xijing, and the town of Shanshan (modern Kunming) became the Eastern Capital, Dongjing. In the



Figure 1.2 The three pagodas of the Chongsheng Temple at Dali, which date from the period of the Nanzhao Kingdom.

late 800s, the two towns were again renamed. Dali became Zhongdu, the Central Capital, and Kunming was called Shangdu, the Upper Capital. Under the Kingdom of Dali, Kunming remained an important urban centre (Rock 1947: 13). It is referred to as secondary capital (fudu) of the Dali kingdom at the time of the conquest of Yunnan by the Mongols (YS: liezhuan 8, 1882).

Tibet was unified into a large and powerful state during the early seventh century. It was able to rival the Chinese Tang empire that was founded at much the same time. Control of the Gansu (or Hexi) Corridor and the Tarim Basin, important because of the major trade routes that traversed them, was disputed between the Chinese and Tibetans for some two and a half centuries, until the Tibetan empire collapsed with the murder of King Glang-dar-ma in 842 (Bell 1924: 30; Petech 1983: 173). This king had persecuted Buddhism, which had become well established in Tibet during the eighth century. He was reputedly murdered by a Buddhist monk in revenge

(Suo Dai 1999: 116). At the height of their power (and at a period of Chinese weakness), the Tibetans had been able to invade China and occupy the capital, Chang'an (modern Xi'an), for a short time in 763 (Beckwith 1993: 146; Suo Dai 1999: 107). During the next thirty years, they took many of the towns of the Gansu Corridor, including Shazhou (Dunhuang), and even Hami. For several months during 791–2, they occupied Gaochang (Khara Khojo) (Beckwith 1993: 148–56). By this time, the struggle in this region had become three-sided. The third power was that of the Uighurs, who had created an empire in the area that later became Mongolia. It was destroyed in 840 after a large Kirghiz army killed the Uighur ruler and burned his royal capital (Mackerras 1972: 124–5). Unfortunately for the Chinese, this almost simultaneous collapse of both the Tibetan and Uighur empires occurred at a period when the Chinese Tang empire was also in terminal decline. The central government was unable to control powerful regional leaders and the Tang dynasty lurched through a series of crises until its final collapse in 907. After the fall of their empire, the Uighurs established themselves in the Gansu Corridor and in the area around the eastern Tian Shan mountains. In the late 840s, they made Ganzhou (Zhangye) the capital of a small state in the Gansu Corridor. This maintained its independent existence for almost two hundred years, until it was incorporated into the Xi Xia kingdom, as already noted above. The more westerly Uighur state was larger, including the area around Hami in the east, the Turfan region, Kucha and Yutian in the west and south-west and crossing the eastern Tian Shan (Bogda Shan) range to Besh Balikh or Beiting (near modern Jimsar). The capital was at Gaochang or Khara Khojo (a short distance west of modern Turfan). The area around Besh Balikh and Gaochang was incorporated into the Uighur empire shortly after the Tibetan occupation of Gaochang ended in 792. When the empire collapsed, many Uighurs moved into the region and a new Uighur khanate was established there. It remained an independent state until Yelü Dashi conquered the region in the late 1120s and made it part of the Karakhitay empire (Allsen 1983: 245–6; Hu Ji *et al.* 1987: 68–73).

In about 763 the Uighur ruler converted to Manichaeism. Subsequently, he imposed the religion on his people, though there was resistance to this and it is doubtful whether all the Uighurs ever accepted the new faith. It became dominant at the royal court, however. The influence of Sogdians, who were also Manichaeans, became correspondingly strong in the Uighur empire (Mackerras 1972: 9–10; Christian 1998: 267–70). The Uighurs wrote their language with the Sogdian script. Literacy appears to have been high in the Gaochang khanate and printing flourished there (Carter 1955: 140–8; Christian 1998: 270). After the end of their empire in 840, the Uighurs appear to have drifted away from Manichaeism and many became Buddhists and Christians (mainly Nestorian Christians, but there were also adherents of the Jacobite sect) (Christian 1998: 270; Larner 1999: 14). The voluntary submission of the Uighurs of Gaochang to Chinggis Khan in 1209 resulted

in considerable influence of Uighur culture on the Mongols. They were the first settled town-dwellers to come under Mongol rule (Allsen 1983: 245). The illiterate Mongols adopted the Uighur script as the basis of the first system of writing for their language. Uighurs soon became spread throughout the Mongol dominions, assisting with the administration of the newly conquered empire (Allsen 1983: 267).

After 842, Tibet fragmented into many small principalities. There is little information available about most of Tibet after this time, until almost the middle of the thirteenth century. Only the most north-easterly Tibetan principalities, which continued to have relations with the major Chinese states, appear with any regularity in the Chinese annals, while the limited Tibetan records refer mainly to religious affairs (Petech 1983: 174). The north-eastern Tibetans (from the area that is now eastern Qinghai) were important to the Chinese during the tenth century as suppliers of horses, needed for the frequent wars of the time. During most of this century, Xiliangfu (Liangzhou or Wuwei) was held by Tibetans. Early in the following century, it was disputed between the Tibetans, the Tanguts and the Gansu Uighurs. It was finally incorporated into the Xi Xia domains in 1031. The rise of the power of the Tanguts and their occupation of the Gansu Corridor, together with the hostility between them and the Chinese Song empire, greatly increased the importance of the Tibetans of the region around the Qinghai Lake or Kökö Nor (Petech 1983: 177). The usual trade route from Central Asia to China through the Gansu Corridor was closed, so that a more southerly route (probably only practicable in summer) had to be used. From Dunhuang (Shazhou), this crossed mountains to reach the north-western side of the Qaidam depression. It continued to the vicinity of the Kökö Nor and then east-south-east to rejoin the old route at or near Lintao (called Xizhou under the Song and early Jin empires). The Kökö Nor Tibetans assisted the Song in their wars against the Tanguts until the end of the eleventh century. In the late 1090s, however, there was turmoil in the region and Song armies intervened. By 1105 they had enforced Song control of much of the area, taking the former local capital of Qingtang in 1104 and giving it the name it still bears, Xining. After about ten years, however, they were forced to withdraw from the region by the Tanguts and, in another decade, were driven out of the whole of north China by the Jurchens (Petech 1983: 178). In about 1136, the Tanguts took Xining (Dunnell 1996: xxiv). The Mongol conquest of Xi Xia brought it into Mongol hands by 1227. The rest of Tibet remained independent. Buddhism had by this time taken a strong hold on the Tibetans and the Buddhist clergy had much political influence (Bell 1924: 31). During the 1240s (or possibly the 1230s), Mongol armies began campaigning on the Tibetan plateau. Initial attacks were followed by attempts to use the Buddhist clergy to obtain the submission of Tibet. Partial subjugation of the Tibetans in the 1250s was followed by revolts in the 1260s. Not until 1267–8 was Tibet finally brought under full Mongol control (Petech 1983: 181–6).

When the Song dynasty was founded, replacing the short-lived Later Zhou dynasty (951–60), there was little to indicate that it was very different from any of its predecessors of the previous half century. Its first emperor, Zhao Kuangyin, was a military commander who took power when the second Zhou emperor died of illness at the age of about 38, leaving only a young child as successor to the throne. Zhao's father had been an army officer under no less than three dynasties (Later Tang, Later Jin and Later Han). The official histories record that Zhao assumed the position of emperor reluctantly, under pressure from his subordinates, though this is likely to be a fiction designed to place him in a favourable light and to help to legitimize his usurpation. He proved to be a highly capable and energetic ruler, taking many rapid and effective measures to consolidate his power and establish his regime (Nanjing University, History Dept. (ed.) 1982: 233, 237). One of the first of these was to persuade all the generals who had helped him to take power to retire (Needham 1954: 132). This avoided the problems of the last century of the Tang dynasty, when regional military commanders were too powerful for the central government to control. He also took the wise step of first attacking and incorporating into the empire the small states in southern China, before trying to tackle the more dangerous enemy, the Khitans, in the north. The important state of Later Shu (controlling the Sichuan Basin, a major economic region) was conquered in 965. By the time of his sudden death in 976, only the states of Wu Yue, centred on Hangzhou, and Northern Han, in southern Shanxi, remained to be subjugated. His successor (his younger brother) soon brought them both into the Song empire, but an attack on the Liao state failed. In 979, Song forces were routed by the Khitan army near the Gaoliang River, just south of modern Beijing (Nanjing University, History Dept. (ed.) 1982: 237–8; Wang 1983: 49–56). Eventually, the Song dynasty was forced to reach an agreement with the Khitans, signing the Treaty of Shanyuan (or Chanyuan) in 1005 on more or less humiliating terms. Song had to pay for peace with annual gifts of silver and silk to the Khitans. A later treaty (1042) increased these payments (Tao 1983: 68). The Song dynasty had to try to accept the fact that it was unable to retake the 'sixteen prefectures' of north-east China. The rise of the Tanguts and their establishment of the Xi Xia state was further humiliation. Nevertheless, paying for peace was cheaper than war (Tao 1983: 79). Song emperors sat more easily on their thrones knowing that they did not face the prospect of being defied or overthrown by generals who commanded powerful regional armies. Though the Song empire never achieved the physical size of the earlier Han or Tang empires, it was probably more prosperous and certainly more populous. Its cities grew to be the largest in the world at the time, for the population expanded rapidly during the eleventh century, reaching perhaps as many as 100 million by about 1120 (Gernet 1962: 17n). The Song dynasty is also noted for its achievements in science and technology, literature of all kinds (from vast historical and encyclopaedic works to poetry and popular fiction), philosophy, education,



Figure 1.3 A general carved in stone stands respectfully to one side of the approach to the tomb of the Song emperor Zhen Zong (died 1022), at Gongxian, east of Luoyang in Henan province.

government and economy. In many ways, the Song empire was the most advanced country in the world at the period (Needham 1954: 134–9; Gernet 1962: 17–18). Within its governing class, however, the desire for territorial expansion was never completely extinguished. It was felt that, in order to demonstrate its legitimacy as successor to the great dynasties of earlier Chinese history, it was necessary for Song to bring all the traditionally Chinese lands within its borders. Otherwise, it was difficult to claim that the

'mandate of Heaven', the divinely conferred right to rule, had truly been given to the Song emperors. Thus, although the necessity for compromise with the Khitans and even with the Tanguts gained acceptance, there was frequently great reluctance on the part of the Song emperors and their ministers to see this as a permanent state of affairs (Wang 1983: 49–55). Song conflict with the Xi Xia state continued over a long period. When an opportunity to take back the 'sixteen prefectures' from the Khitans presented itself, it was eagerly grasped. In the longer term, however, the consequences for the Song empire were disastrous.

Towards the end of the seventh century, a small state was founded in the north-east by a group or tribe of the people then called Mohe. Its territory came to include much of modern Jilin province, with parts of southern Heilongjiang and eastern Liaoning provinces, as well as north-eastern Korea. It was called Bohai (in Korean, Parhae). It generally accepted subordinate status to the Chinese Tang empire, presenting tribute and receiving titles for its rulers from the Tang emperors. Chinese was used as a literary language within its borders and students from Bohai travelled to the Tang capital to increase their learning. After the fall of the Tang dynasty, it continued to exist as an independent state until it was conquered by the Khitans in 926 and incorporated into the Liao empire. At about this period, the Mohe became known as Jurchens (in Chinese, Nüzhen). Apart from those who had lived in Bohai, they were spread across the region around the Ussuri, Sungari and lower Amur rivers and varied quite considerably in lifestyles, some cultivating crops while others relied principally on herding pigs or were hunter-gatherers (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982a: 87–8; Ledyard 1983: 322–3).

During the eleventh century, the Jurchens gradually developed their power. After 1100, they began to resist the domination of the Khitans. In 1114, their leader Aguda embarked on open war against the Liao state. He defeated a Liao army in what is now north-eastern Jilin province and, early in 1115, declared himself emperor of the Great Jin dynasty. Later in the year he inflicted further defeats on the Khitans. After this, the Jurchens began to replace the Khitans as the major power of the north-east. For the Song empire, the conflict between these two groups of 'barbarians' seemed to offer the chance at last to reverse the loss of the 'sixteen prefectures'. It was a long tradition in China to use the policy of 'divide and rule' to weaken 'barbarian' neighbours. As news of the rise of the Jurchens reached the Song court, it was decided to explore the possibility of an alliance with them against the Khitans. An embassy was sent by sea from modern Shandong to the Jurchens and reached an agreement in 1120. Song armies were to attack the southern Liao capitals of Yanjing (modern Beijing) and Xijing (modern Datong in Shanxi), while the Jurchens were to fight the Khitans further north. After the destruction of the Liao empire, the southerly areas were to be taken by Song while the rest was to be incorporated into the Jin domains. Song was slow to move, however. In 1122, the Jurchens had to send an

embassy to the Song court to press for action. At last, Song armies advanced towards Yanjing. Unfortunately, an expected uprising of Chinese in the city failed to materialize and the Liao armies inflicted a series of defeats on their Song adversaries. Eventually, the Song forces retreated in disarray. The campaign ended in total failure (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 253–5). Meanwhile, Aguda's armies had been much more successful, taking the Liao capital, Shangjing, in 1120 and the subordinate capitals Zhongjing and Xijing in 1122. After this, the Liao emperor fled westwards. Jin forces then occupied the districts to the north, east and west of Yanjing. Early in 1123, as they advanced towards the city, members of the Liao royal family and nobility fled. The officials who remained opened the gates to the Jurchen armies and Yanjing was occupied by Jin forces.

Shortly after the Jin occupation of Yanjing, Song ambassadors arrived to request that the Jurchens honour their agreement and hand the city over to the Song empire. In view of the Song military failure, the Jurchens were not pleased. However, Song agreed to make substantial annual payments to Jin (including an amount to compensate for the loss of revenues from Yanjing) and the Jurchens evacuated the city, taking from it almost everything of any value and most of its population. It then became Yanshanfu, within the Song empire. This status did not last long. After the Jurchens had finished dealing with the remaining Liao forces and had captured the last Liao emperor, in 1125, they turned against Song. Early in 1126, they again occupied Yanjing (Yanshanfu). They then marched south and attacked the Song capital of Bianjing (modern Kaifeng). It fell late in the year. Two Song emperors (one had recently abdicated) were captured by the Jurchens along with the palace ladies and many high officials. The following year, they were taken away to the north (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 258–9). A Song prince declared himself emperor in Nanjing (modern Shangqiu in Henan). During the next few years, Jin and Song armies fought over the region between the Yellow River and the Yangtze and the new emperor moved from city to city. Finally, he settled in Lin'an (modern Hangzhou) and it became the capital of what, after the fall of Kaifeng, is known as the Southern Song dynasty (Gernet 1962: 22–5; Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 279).

Eventually the border between the Jin and Song empires stabilized, running along the Huai River in the east and then turning somewhat northwards, north of the valley of the Han River, to the Qinling mountains in what is now southern Shaanxi. The Song empire no longer had a common border with the Xi Xia state, but the Sichuan Basin remained under its control, as well as the whole of the lower Yangtze region. Its population was still more than 60 million, in an area almost as large as western Europe (Gernet 1962: 17). By this period, southern China had in fact become more productive and prosperous than the north. The area around the lower Yangtze was the major grain-producing region of China, as it has continued to be to the present (Shiba 1970: 46–7, 51–2). After the fall of the north to the Jurchens, there were large migrations of north Chinese into Southern Song territory.

Several million people, a significant portion of the roughly 40 million in the area taken from the Song, probably moved southwards. So many migrated from the north to the new capital at Hangzhou that the local language was significantly affected (LaPolla 2001: 229–30). The loss of the north and the move of the capital to southern China considerably altered the outlook of the government of Song China. Relations with the Jurchens were generally bad and the Song empire was cut off from direct access to the old overland trade routes across central Asia, with their associated diplomatic contacts. In the wetter south, shipping had always been much more important than in the north, for lakes and rivers were the major arteries of communication there. Overseas trade in Chinese ships developed greatly during the period of the Song dynasty, with regular voyages to various parts of South-east Asia and at least as far as southern India (Gernet 1962: 82–3; Shiba 1970: 1, 6–9; Shiba 1983: 102–8).

After some fifteen years of intermittent warfare, the Song and Jin empires finally made peace in 1141. As with the Khitans, Song paid for the suspension of hostilities with the Jurchens with annual 'gifts' of silver and silk. The peace did not last long, however. Early in 1150, the ruling Jin emperor was assassinated by a relative, who seized the throne. This new emperor took a much more aggressive stance towards Song, moving the main Jin capital southwards to Yanjing (modern Beijing) in 1153. The city was rebuilt and renamed Zhongdu. Work was also begun on preparing Bianjing (modern Kaifeng) for a further southward shift. In 1159, the Jin empire forbade its subjects to cross the border into Song territory. Song reciprocated by forbidding seaborne trade with Jin. War between the two states began in 1161, with Jin armies invading Song territory and attempting, unsuccessfully, to cross the Yangtze. The emperor personally led the invasion of Song. While he was away on campaign, another member of the Jin royal family seized the throne. An officer in the army killed the emperor at Guazhou on the north bank of the Yangtze. He was posthumously stripped of the imperial title and became known as Prince of Hailing (Hailing Wang). Song attempted to take advantage of the internal problems of the Jin empire by invading its territory, but its army was defeated in 1163. Peace was again made between the two empires (Dawson 1972: 167–8; Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 313–14; Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 264–5).

Relations between Jin and Song were always uneasy, however. If it had been hard for Song to reconcile itself to the loss of the 'sixteen prefectures' around modern Beijing to the Khitans, it was very much harder to accept the Jin occupation of most of northern China. Many officials of the Song court favoured peace with Jin when there seemed little prospect of success in attacks on the north, but when the situation appeared to offer a good chance of victory then attitudes changed. Thus, as the power of the Mongols began to threaten the Jin empire, which was also beset by internal difficulties, Song decided to go on the offensive. An invasion of northern China began in 1206, but after initial successes the Song armies were driven back. Song



Figure 1.4 Architecture of the Jin dynasty: a building erected in about 1150 at the Shanhua Buddhist Temple at Datong in Shanxi province.

soon began to sue for peace, but fighting continued until 1208, when Song accepted humiliating terms to end the war (Peterson 1983: 205). This debacle seems considerably to have dampened enthusiasm for war at the Song court. Despite the losses suffered by Jin as a result of Mongol attacks after 1211, which forced the Jin emperor to move south from Zhongdu to Bianjing (Kaifeng) in 1214, Song armies made no move to invade the Jin empire again. Song did, however, stop making its annual payments to Jin after 1214, and subsequently began to give support to rebels within Jin territory. This was as far as it seemed to be prepared to go. These actions might have been enough to cause the collapse of the Jin empire under Mongol pressure, if it had not been for the fact that the Mongols greatly relaxed the pressure after 1216. The main Mongol armies moved away westwards to attack the

Karakhitay state and Khwarazm. Jin decided to try to hold the Mongols in the north and mount a major campaign against Song in the south. It needed to expand its resources if it were successfully to resist the Mongols. Although its armies did well in the field, they were unable to penetrate the Sichuan Basin or threaten a crossing of the Yangtze. Song refused negotiations, so that in the end (in 1224) Jin could only announce a truce, which Song accepted (Peterson 1983: 207–10).

Little is known with certainty about contacts between the Song empire and the Mongols at this period. It seems that the Mongols tried unsuccessfully to make contact with Song as early as about 1213. At that time, Song does not seem to have had much interest in entering into relations, probably because the Mongols were seen as just another group of contemptible northern 'barbarians'. The earliest definite Song–Mongol discussions occurred in 1221 and 1223. As far as is known, they had no very concrete result (Peterson 1983: 218–20). A Mongol attempt in 1231 to negotiate with Song regarding passage of their troops through Song territory to attack Jin from the south was rebuffed: the Mongol envoys were killed by a local Song commander. Eventually, in 1233, some kind of agreement was reached between Song and the Mongols on a joint attack on Jin. This took place in 1234 and was the final act in the long struggle to destroy the Jin empire (Peterson, 1983: 221–4). Thus, the Song and Mongol empires became neighbours, with no intervening buffer states. If Song had hoped to gain any large amount of territory by participating in the final destruction of Jin, these hopes were in vain. It soon became clear that the old enemy, the Jurchens, had simply been replaced by a new one, the Mongols, who were to prove far more formidable. Of all the states that the Mongols sought to subjugate, however, the Song empire held out the longest. It was to take more than four decades after the fall of Jin before the Song dynasty was finally extinguished.

The Jin empire only survived for some 120 years (1115–1234), holding most of north China for just over a century. The Jurchens generally copied Chinese methods of administration and are often considered to have been highly sinicized. They nevertheless seem to have retained their distinct identity, to at least some degree, until the end of their dynasty. Those who remained in the north-east probably changed little. There were still Jurchens in the region during the Ming dynasty. At that period, many of them were considered uncivilized by the Chinese and were referred to as 'wild tribes' (Serruys 1955: 18). During the period of the Jin dynasty, the Jurchens continued to use their own language and developed their own script, translating important Chinese works into Jurchen and printing a number of them (Carter 1955: 87). As seems to have been also the case with the Khitans and certainly with the Mongols, there were disputes between those Jurchens who wished to become more 'Chinese' and those who wanted to retain their own identity. The usurpation of the Hailing Wang and his eventual assassination were, at least partly, a result of this conflict within the Jurchen ruling family. He wished to make the Jin dynasty a much more 'Chinese' dynasty, moving

the capital to Zhongdu (Beijing) and intending to move it again to Bianjing (Kaifeng), in the heart of north China. He was also heavily influenced by Confucian scholarship (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 264). His overthrow was to a large extent a reaction by the more conservative members of the ruling family and nobility against his moves towards greater sinicization of the Jurchens. Although the move of capital to Zhongdu had already occurred and was not reversed, his intended further move to Bianjing, for which major preparatory work had already been completed, was abandoned. Not until 1214, under pressure from the Mongols, was such a move eventually made. Although it is clear that many Jurchens in north China did tend to assimilate to the Chinese, many must also have remained distinct. Official policy of the dynasty strongly encouraged this. On several occasions, edicts were issued forbidding the Jurchens to take Chinese surnames. On at least two occasions, in 1187 and 1207, they were also forbidden to imitate the costume of 'southerners' (nan ren: presumably Chinese from the territory of Southern Song are meant) (JS: benji 8, 131; benji 12, 186).

Immediately to the north of these several Chinese states lay Mongolia, the area that is today the Mongolian Republic and was formerly Outer Mongolia. This does not form part of the modern Chinese state but was included in the Chinese empire throughout the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). During the twelfth century it was not a unified political entity, but rather 'a region of loose tribal confederations' (Christian 1998: 385). Only at the end of the century was it gradually brought under the leadership of a single ruler, Temüjin, who took the title of Chinggis Khan in 1206 (or possibly somewhat earlier). By that year he had brought more or less all of the peoples of Mongolia under his domination. Mongol raids had already spread beyond Mongolia, with an attack on the Tangut Xi Xia kingdom in 1205. Another followed in 1207. These were undertaken purely for plunder, but a more serious attempt to subjugate the Tanguts was made in 1209. They capitulated the following year and agreed to pay tribute to the Mongols, though remaining otherwise independent (Christian 1998: 400–1). After this success, Chinggis Khan turned his attention to the much greater prize of northern China. A series of raids began in 1211. The Juyong Pass close to the city of Zhongdu (modern Beijing), capital of the Jin dynasty, was forced in 1211 and again in 1213. The city itself successfully resisted Mongol attacks. In 1213, the Mongols were persuaded to withdraw from north China by substantial gifts and the marriage of a Jin princess to Chinggis Khan. The Jin emperor was so alarmed by the repeated appearance of the Mongols in the vicinity of Zhongdu, that in 1214 he moved his capital to Bianjing or Bianliang (modern Kaifeng). He was just in time, as Zhongdu fell to the Mongols the following year after a short siege (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 301–3).

It seems likely that, at this stage in the rise of the Mongols, they were not very concerned to conquer and hold large areas of territory with sedentary populations. This was not within the tradition of warfare on the steppes, where acquiring the animals and grazing lands of enemies was the primary

aim. Attacks on lands such as China, with cities and tilled fields, were usually aimed principally at acquiring booty (Christian 1998: 399). This was, in fact, the pattern with the earliest Mongol raids on Xi Xia and Jin. It was the refusal of the Xi Xia ruler to send troops to join the Mongol armies in their campaign against the Karakhitay that prompted Chinggis Khan to invade the state again. Having eventually returned to Mongolia in 1225 from his long campaigns against the Karakhitay empire and the Khwarazm Shah, he embarked upon the punishment of Xi Xia in 1226. When he died the following year, the Mongols massacred the inhabitants of the Tangut capital. The Xi Xia state ceased to exist (Christian 1998: 403–4). The long war against the Jin empire resulted from its obstinate refusal to submit to the Mongols. Payments were made from time to time, to persuade their armies to withdraw from Jin territory, but no definite submission and acceptance of Mongol overlordship could be extracted from the Jurchens. The Mongols therefore continued their attacks on Jin. After the submission of the Gaochang Uighurs and the Karakhitay empire, and defections of Khitans and Chinese from Jin, the Mongols must have begun to be persuaded of the possibility of a different pattern of conquest, one that involved more than booty raids and exaction of tribute. Yelü Chucai is said to have repeated to Chinggis Khan's successor, Ögödei, an old Chinese saying, that although the empire could be won on horseback, it could not be governed on horseback (Morgan 1986: 84). With the Khitans and Uighurs (among others) to advise and assist them, the Mongol rulers realized that they could control and exploit the territories that they overran on a long-term, organized basis.

2 The Mongols and their conquests

When Chinggis Khan embarked on his extraordinary career of conquest, the Mongols were an illiterate, nomadic people, whose chances of conquering and governing a large empire might have been estimated as extremely low to non-existent. In 1206, after his election (or acclamation: there was no other candidate) as leader of all the peoples of Mongolia, Chinggis Khan appointed 95 commanders of one thousand men in his army. His own personal bodyguard or keshig included some ten thousand men (Christian 1998: 396–7). This would put the theoretical size of the Mongol army at this time at a maximum of about 105,000 (Morgan 1986: 87), but assuming that the figures of 'thousand' and 'ten thousand' are probably over-estimates, the real number would be less than 100,000. By 1227 this figure may have increased to about 130,000 men (Morgan 1986: 87; Christian 1998: 397). Again, this number may well be somewhat exaggerated. The entire population of Mongolia at the period has been estimated to have numbered only some 700,000 (Allsen 1983: 245). Presumably because they were not very numerous, the Mongols were always anxious to avoid incurring casualties, fighting mainly at a distance. They are reported to have used their bows to avoid close combat, and to have placed surrendered or captured, non-Mongol, soldiers in front of their own men (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 37; Morgan 1986: 91; Christian 1998: 402–3). Another tactic, which seems to have been effective, was to massacre the inhabitants of cities that refused to surrender on demand. The Mongols always tried to avoid the necessity for a siege, with the likelihood of heavy casualties among the attacking forces. The people of cities that surrendered usually avoided being summarily slaughtered. There was thus a great incentive to capitulate rather than fight (Morgan 1986: 93).

In the whole of Mongolia during the early thirteenth century, there was no permanent settlement of any size. The Mongol empire had no capital city until 1235, when Ögödei walled Karakorum (Morgan 1986: 114; YS: benji 2, 20). The Mongols were an unsophisticated, uncultured people, herding their animals and living in their yurts (or, more strictly, gers: the commonly used word 'yurt' is of Turkic origin). There was no system for writing their language until the Uighurs supplied them with a script during the reign of Chinggis Khan. It may have been Uighurs working for the Naimans who



Figure 2.1 A Mongol encampment, from a nineteenth-century drawing. The basic way of life of nomadic Mongols probably changed little over the centuries.

were responsible for this, after they fell into Mongol hands when the Naimans were crushed in 1204 (Allsen 1983: 267; Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 322). Certainly the Uighurs and the Khitans played a major role in the organization and administration of the early Mongol empire (Morgan 1986: 108). Indeed, at least in the eastern regions of the empire, centred on China, Mongols always remained a minority in the government service (Serruys 1959: 134n; YS: liezhuan 17, 2004). It is quite likely that the far-reaching conquests of the Mongols were more or less accidental, in the sense that there was no initial 'grand plan' to overrun the entire known world (Christian 1998: 399). The world known to the Mongols in about 1200 would, in any case, probably not have been very large. The earliest Mongol campaigns against sedentary peoples sought to enforce submission and the payment of tribute. At most, a Mongol governor was imposed on those who submitted, who were otherwise left largely to their own affairs. Thus, when the Uighurs of Gaochang submitted voluntarily in 1209, Chinggis Khan did no more than establish a garrison in Uighur territory and demand that their ruler personally present tribute at his court (Allsen 1983: 247). It was probably only later, during the reign of Ögödei, that Mongol darughachi (roughly, governors) were appointed over the Uighurs (Allsen 1983: 251–2). Similarly, the early campaigns against Xi Xia resulted in the Tanguts accepting Mongol overlordship: their ruler was left in place (Morgan 1986: 65). It was his refusal to supply troops to the Mongols for their campaign against the Karakhitay empire that resulted in the destruction of the Xi Xia state in 1227 (Morgan 1986: 71–2). In 1213, the Jin rulers

of northern China were able to buy off the Mongols from the gates of Zhongdu. If the Jin empire had been prepared to offer submission to the Mongols and pay annual tribute, it might have avoided the repeated Mongol attacks that eventually led to its destruction. By the time of the fall of the Jin dynasty in 1234, however, the outlook of the Mongols was changing. They seem to have begun to accept the possibility of direct involvement in governing their conquests. Already, in 1231, Ögödei had begun to establish more sophisticated organs of administration in the form of the Central Secretariat, the Zhongshusheng (YS: benji 2, 18). This later provided the basis for the government of all China, with provincial secretariats modelled on the central government pattern. The division of China into large provinces was a Mongol innovation. Smaller units of government below provincial level remained similar to those of earlier times, though there were frequent changes of administrative boundaries and status under the Mongols. They seem to have taken some time to arrive at a satisfactory, stable, administrative structure. Along with the reorganization of the government system under Ögödei, a start was made on the restoration of the status of Confucianism, formerly the state philosophy of China. In 1233, Ögödei conferred an appropriate title on the 51st generation descendant of Confucius and ordered the repair of Confucian temples (YS: benji 2, 19).

The succession of Ögödei after the death of Chinggis Khan had been comparatively smooth, apparently without any major disputes. He was not confirmed as Great Khan until 1229,[1] however, probably because of some dissension on the part of Tolui, youngest son of Chinggis Khan (De Rachewiltz 1983: 293). The Mongol domains were already so large at this time that they were divided between Chinggis Khan's successors. Such division was in any case a Mongol tradition. The eldest son normally received the lands furthest from the home camp. Accordingly, the far western territories (at this time, still largely unconquered) were allotted to Jochi, or rather to his son Batu, as Jochi had died before his father. The second son, Chaghadai, received roughly the former Karakhitay empire, with some additional territory. Tolui was allotted Mongolia. The Great Khan, Ögödei, was at least nominally the supreme overlord of all the Mongols, as well as directly ruling over as much of China as had been conquered at this time (excluding, of course, most of the former Karakhitay lands in what is now Xinjiang) (Morgan 1986: 112–14). The Mongols had been campaigning very widely during the 1220s. After marching almost unopposed across the Karakhitay empire, they had invaded the lands of the Khwarazm Shah, who had only recently conquered part of the western territory of Karakhitay and made Samarkand his capital. He failed to put up serious resistance to the invaders and fled to an island in the Caspian Sea, where he later died. A Mongol army pursued him, and then returned eastwards via the Caucasus and a route north of the Caspian. Meanwhile, the main Mongol forces had wrought havoc in Khwarazm, destroying many cities and massacring their inhabitants. Samarkand was among those which suffered this fate (Morgan 1986: 68–82).

While Mongol armies under Tolui were fighting in Khwarazm and the Khwarazm Shah was being pursued to the west, Chinggis Khan returned to Mongolia to settle affairs with Xi Xia (see Chapter 1). Mongol forces entered Xi Xia via Ejina (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 59–60). They not only overran the whole of the Xi Xia state, but also penetrated Jin territory and took all of the most westerly part of the Jin empire, including Hezhou (modern Linxia), Lintao and Deshun (modern Jingning) (JS: benji 17, 262–3; Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 59–60). Despite the withdrawal of troops for the campaigns in the west, Mongol forces had continued fighting against Jin more or less continuously since 1213. After 1229, when the succession of Ögödei had been settled and the fighting to the west was largely concluded, a more determined attempt was made finally to subjugate Jin. By 1233, most of the Jin empire was in Mongol hands and it seemed on the point of collapse. Nevertheless, the Mongols sought assistance from Song for the final assault. The Song empire supplied grain to the Mongol armies. It may, in fact, have been lack of food supplies that was the main reason for the Mongol alliance with Song at this time (Peterson 1983: 224). The renowned Song general, Meng Gong, led 20,000 soldiers north to participate in the last battles against Jin, which was finally destroyed early in 1234 (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 291; Peterson 1983: 224).

The fighting in north China had left large areas devastated, in particular the area of modern Henan province, where Jin had made its last stand. After the fall of Jin, most Mongol troops withdrew from Henan, some to mop up remnants of Jin forces in other places, many to return northwards. It is likely that this withdrawal was necessitated by the insufficiency of food supplies in Henan, which made it impossible to support a large number of soldiers there. Mongol leaders met in Mongolia in the summer of 1234 to celebrate the victory over Jin and consider future actions. Song took advantage of this withdrawal to send its armies to occupy Henan, hoping to establish a defensive line along the Yellow River at which a Mongol attack could be withstood. Their forward movement encountered no resistance. It proved impossible to move up adequate supplies, however. When the Mongol attack came, the Song soldiers were rapidly put to flight. They were reportedly weak with hunger (Peterson 1983: 226–30). For the time being, however, the Mongols did not follow up their victory. Although the eventual conquest of Song China seems definitely to have been decided upon in 1235 (Peterson 1983: 238n), other matters were considered to have priority. The first major campaign of expansion was to be in the west, where the lands allotted to Batu, Jochi's heir, were to be subjugated. The main Mongol armies marched off towards Russia, crushing the Kipchaks and the Volga Bulgars on their way. After attacking the principalities of Russia and destroying several Russian cities, they pulled back to the area between the Don and the Volga, and then advanced again into Hungary and Poland. They even penetrated the Balkans, entering Bulgaria, Croatia and Dalmatia in pursuit of the fleeing King of Hungary. They did not remain long in these areas. There may have

been a variety of reasons for their withdrawal at this time and failure ever again to attempt to advance further into Europe, including the insufficiency of pasturage for their animals. A major cause was probably the death of Ögödei in 1241. The leaders of this western campaign included Batu himself, Ögödei's son, Güyüg (who was eventually to succeed him) and Möngke, the eldest son of Tolui (Christian 1998: 409–11). They could not afford to remain so distant from Mongolia during the period leading up to the proclamation of the next Great Khan. There was, in fact, considerable division among the Mongol ruling family regarding the succession. A long interregnum followed Ögödei's death. Not until 1246 was Güyüg finally proclaimed Great Khan, apparently much against the wishes of Batu. Güyüg was to reign for only two years. His early death, usually ascribed to overindulgence in sex and alcohol, probably averted open war between himself and Batu (Morgan 1986: 116). Güyüg was not the only Mongol Khan to die young: excessive drinking was encouraged by Mongol custom (Spuler 1971: 34).

The dispute over who should succeed Güyüg dragged on for three years, while his widow acted as regent. Eventually Batu and the family of Tolui (who had died in 1233) took decisive action. With Batu's support, Tolui's eldest son, Möngke, was made Great Khan in 1251. Many members of the families of Ögödei and Chaghadai were killed, including Güyüg's widow (Allsen 1983: 251; Morgan 1986: 117, 182). Once Möngke was firmly settled on the throne, new campaigns were planned and undertaken. In 1253, his brother Hülegü was sent off to destroy the Assassins or Isma'ilis of Persia and to secure the submission (or, failing that, the destruction) of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Assassins were suppressed during 1256 and 1257 and the seat of the caliph, Baghdad, was besieged in 1258. When it eventually fell, it was looted and some 200,000 people were slaughtered. The caliph shared their fate. In 1260, as Hülegü was advancing with his armies through Syria, he learned of the death of Möngke. He pulled back, with the majority of his forces. The remainder were defeated at Ayn Jalut by the Mamluks of Egypt and forced to withdraw from Syria. Hülegü nevertheless controlled Persia and Iraq and was able to establish his own khanate there, which became known as the Il-Khanate. It maintained good relations with the Great Khans of the Far East for a long period (Morgan 1986: 147–57; Christian 1998: 411–12).

While Hülegü was fighting in Persia, new campaigns were also undertaken in China. A major invasion of Tibet almost immediately followed Möngke's installation as Great Khan (Petech 1983: 182). In 1253, Möngke's brother, Khubilai, began a move intended to outflank the Song empire, marching armies through what is now western Sichuan to attack the Kingdom of Dali. This was a remarkable move, for the mountainous terrain of western Sichuan and adjacent northern Yunnan is difficult country to cross with a large army. However, there was no likelihood of any serious opposition to the Mongol forces from the various tribes and small principalities of the area and presumably the invasion took Dali by surprise. The Mongols entered Yunnan by two routes, the more westerly one leading to Dali from

the north, via modern Zhongdian, while to the east Khubilai himself entered Dali territory near modern Xichang. It did not take long for the kingdom to fall. Khubilai showed himself more merciful than his predecessors. Although the ambassadors he had sent ahead to demand the submission of the Dali ruler were killed and the town of Dali resisted the Mongol attack, there was no massacre. By early 1254, Dali had been taken and Yunnan was more or less under Mongol control, though mopping-up operations continued for some time. Khubilai returned northwards shortly after the fall of Dali, leaving his general Uriangkhadai (in Chinese, Wulianghetai) in charge in Yunnan (Du Yuting and Chen Lüfan 1979: 3–4). Uriangkhadai continued the work of subjugating the various peoples of Yunnan. In 1255, at the command of Möngke, he moved north into Sichuan and defeated a Song army at modern Yibin. He continued his advance westwards to Chongqing and Hechuan. Building on this success, Möngke launched a three-pronged attack on Song territory in 1258, himself leading an army eastwards from southern Sichuan while Khubilai pushed southwards from former Jin territory towards modern Wuhan. Uriangkhadai led Mongol cavalry, with troops from the newly submitted peoples of Yunnan, east into Guangxi and Hunan, defeating Song forces near modern Guilin and Changsha before reaching and crossing the Yangtze River at Wuhan (Du Yuting and Chen Lüfan 1979: 4–5; YS: liezhuan 8, 1882–4). This campaign was brought prematurely to an end by the death of Möngke in the summer of 1259, while fighting a Song army in eastern Sichuan (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 327). Khubilai returned northwards to Kaiping (later renamed Shangdu), where he was proclaimed Great Khan in 1260. Shortly afterwards, his younger brother Arigh Böke, who was in Karakorum, also claimed the title. A civil war that lasted four years ensued, with Khubilai Khan himself taking the field against the forces of his brother (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 328–9; Morgan 1986: 117). The war against Song was again suspended.

The dispute between Arigh Böke and Khubilai was more than just a family quarrel over who had the right to the greater inheritance. It was also a symptom of a rift within the Mongols between what might be called the ‘old guard’, who wanted to hold on to their nomadic roots, and those who saw nothing wrong in becoming more ‘civilized’ and absorbing influences from the peoples they had conquered. Khubilai was at the forefront of the move away from the steppes. During his reign, Karakorum was abandoned as a capital and sank to the status of a local administrative centre. Very soon after becoming Great Khan, he began preparations to move the capital southward into China. He had a complete new city, Dadu, built on the site of modern Beijing (De Rachewiltz 1983: 291–2; Morgan 1986: 118). Shangdu continued to be used as a summer capital, to avoid the heat of Beijing. In 1272, Khubilai adopted the Chinese title of ‘Yuan’ for his dynasty, at the suggestion of Liu Bingzhong. Liu was a north Chinese who for some thirty years was an important adviser to Khubilai, accompanying him on his campaigns in Yunnan and south China and overseeing the building of both

Shangdu and Dadu (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 328). Dissent within the Mongol ruling house after 1260 led to the effective break-up of the great Mongol empire (Morgan 1986: 157–8). After the defeat of Arigh Böke in 1264, a new claimant to be the rightful Great Khan appeared. This was Khaidu, grandson of Ögödei and nephew of Güyüg. He gained the support of the descendants of Chaghadai in their Central Asian khanate and embarked on war against Khubilai Khan. In 1268, he advanced eastwards across northern Xinjiang, probably towards Karakorum (Allsen 1983: 254). He remained a serious problem for Khubilai and his successor until his death in 1302 or 1303 (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 334–5; Morgan 1986: 118). In 1287–8, in a campaign referred to by Marco Polo (MP/Latham 1958: 113–19; MP/Hambis 1980: 196–203), Khubilai personally took to the field against Khaidu's allies in eastern Mongolia, who were led by Nayan, descendant of a younger brother of Chinggis Khan (Petech 1983: 189; MP/Hambis 1980: 196n). Nayan was defeated, but Khaidu's armies caused intermittent trouble in the area of the former Uighur khanate of Gaochang throughout the 1280s and into the 1290s. Although Yuan forces had considerable success against Khaidu, it seems that it was felt that the effort required to maintain control of the Uighur lands could not be justified. Despite the defeat and death of Khaidu in the early 1300s, they were abandoned to the Chaghadai khanate (Allsen 1983: 254–5, 257–61).

After the defeat of Arigh Böke in 1264, Khubilai was able once more to devote his attention to the conquest of Song. Fighting got under way again in 1265, the Song army suffering several defeats. In 1268, Mongol forces began a long siege at Xiangyang and in the following year also besieged neighbouring Fancheng (the two are today united in the municipality of Xiangfan). Song attacks on the besieging forces were repeatedly defeated, but it was not until 1273 that Fancheng fell and Xiangyang surrendered. Thereafter, Yuan armies advanced rapidly south-eastwards, aided by defections from the Song side. Early in 1276, they arrived at the Song capital, Lin'an (modern Hangzhou), which soon surrendered. Two young Song princes escaped from the city and one was shortly proclaimed emperor at Fuzhou. The Song cause was clearly now lost, however. Towards the end of 1276, it received what was more or less the final blow when Pu Shougeng surrendered and joined the Yuan side. Pu was commander of the Song fleet at Quanzhou and a rich Muslim merchant, of Persian descent, with wide influence and power. His defection greatly increased Yuan naval strength. The last Song emperor, who was only eight years old, was forced to retreat to an island near Guangzhou. When Yuan forces attacked in 1279, one of his ministers took hold of him and jumped into the sea, so that both were drowned. This brought the Song dynasty to final extinction (Dawson 1972: 195–6; Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 298, 330–3). For the first time for several centuries, almost all of what had ever been Chinese territory, with some significant additions such as most of Yunnan,

was brought under unified rule. This unification was, in fact, a major Mongol contribution to Chinese history.

It has already been said above that the Mongol empire effectively broke apart after 1260. Its fragments were still large empires in their own right, however, and at least the Il-Khans of Persia continued to recognize the general overlordship of the Great Khans. A representative of the Great Khan resided permanently at the Il-Khan court until after the death of Khubilai Khan (Spuler 1971: 42, 48). Even during the early period of warfare between Khaidu and Khubilai, the Central Asian trade routes remained open and generally safe and passes issued by the Great Khan seem to have continued to be recognized more or less throughout all Mongol domains. Mongol achievements in successfully governing their vast territories were quite remarkable. There can be little doubt that much of their success in this respect was due to their willingness to use the advice and experience of others. Chinggis Khan was influenced by Uighurs such as Tatatonga even before his conquests expanded beyond the boundaries of Mongolia (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 322; Christian 1998: 398). The role of the Khitans has already been suggested above (see Chapter 1). Under Khubilai, although the government of the Yuan empire had new and distinctive features, it increasingly came to owe a great deal to Chinese precedent.

As territory outside Mongolia began to fall under direct Mongol control, it was at first allotted as appanages to Mongol princes, just as steppe lands had been. This was done with much of the former Xi Xia and Jin empires in north China. As already mentioned with reference to the Uighurs, darughachi were usually appointed where it was necessary for settled populations to be controlled and administered. The chief concern of the Mongols was to obtain from the lands and people that they had subjugated as much wealth as they could. They were the conquerors, they were the masters, and they considered it right and fitting that they should enjoy the fullest benefits from the position they had won. It seems that they often had little idea of how to do so, at least in a sustainable way, but there were many among those they conquered who were able to help and advise them. There was probably a complex interplay between the Mongols and the various groups of peoples who came under their rule (De Rachewiltz 1983: 294–5). At least in China, it seems that the Mongol khans experimented with a variety of government methods and made frequent changes to the administrative system before they felt that they had arrived at something that worked well. The appanage system soon began to be abandoned, the tax farming that was much used at first in northern China was replaced, agriculture and commerce were promoted. The traditional Chinese government salt monopoly was reinstated by as early as 1230 (Dawson 1972: 189). Although there were occasional instances of massacres during the Mongol conquest of south China, it was in general a much less bloody affair than the conquest of the Jin empire had been. Khubilai understood that the wealth of the country depended on minimum disturbance of agriculture, commerce and urban life and tried to

take over the Southern Song empire as undamaged as possible. Wealthy landowners and merchants were not deprived of their property (Morgan 1986: 120). The unification of China and the opening up of commercial possibilities in other parts of the Mongol empire offered opportunities that had scarcely existed previously. Nevertheless, Khubilai continued to mount costly military expeditions, in addition to spending huge amounts on the construction of the new capital of Dadu and the associated canal projects that enabled it to be supplied with water and with grain and other products from the south (Morgan 1986: 130). The expenditure on all this had, of course, to be provided by income from taxation.

It is nevertheless questionable whether Mongol exactions from the populations they conquered were significantly more severe than those of other rulers of the time. No great loyalty to their rulers seems to have been felt by the subjects of Jin and Song. Throughout the period of Mongol attacks on China and the wars between the Song and Jin empires, from about 1210 until 1279, there was a series of rebellions in both Jin and Song territory, which reduced the empires' strength in the face of external enemies. Nor does it appear that the Chinese of the north identified strongly with their southern kin. Song appeals to northern Chinese to rise against their Jurchen rulers and assist Song invasions almost invariably fell on deaf ears. Rebels who operated in the border lands between the Song and Jin empires were not trusted by the Song court and very often did, in fact, switch their allegiance whenever it suited them to do so. The career of the rebel Li Quan, father or adoptive father of Li Tan, is a good example. He came from what is today Weifang in Shandong and rose in rebellion against the Jin dynasty during the war between Song and Jin in 1206–8. Although apparently loyal to Song for much of his career, he was always distrusted by the Song government and quarrelled with other 'loyalist' rebels. When Mongol pressure became too great, in 1226–7, he switched his allegiance to the Mongols. Subsequently he entered into relations with Song again, but seems essentially to have been hedging his bets and was in fact a more or less independent warlord until he was killed in 1231 (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 289; Peterson 1983: 212–18). There is also the case of Zhang Lin, who was an important Jin commander in Shandong. He switched allegiance to Song in 1219 but then fell out with Li Quan and, in 1221, went over to the Mongols (Peterson 1983: 212–13). For most ordinary people, it probably made little difference who their rulers were. The people of Henan suffered at the hands of Song armies when the north was invaded during the wars between Jin and Song. They seem to have felt no particular loyalty to any potential government, whether Jin, Song or Mongol. At this period, there was probably little sense among the mass of the population of any strong ethnic identity and associated ties (Peterson 1983: 207, 214).

A very important feature of Mongol administration was the organization of an effective means of communication, a difficult problem in a large empire in premodern times. It has, in fact, been suggested that one reason why the

Yuan emperors eventually abandoned the regions in the west that are today Xinjiang was that they were simply too far away from the capital at Dadu to be controlled effectively (Morgan 1986: 118). Mongol communications were, however, extremely good. They were founded on a system of postal relay stations called 'jam'. This was established during the reign of Ögödei (Allsen 1983: 264). There were, in fact, Chinese precedents dating back several centuries and it is likely that something similar had existed in China immediately before the Mongol conquest, which provided the basis for the jam. Certainly there was a similar system in operation during the eighth century, under the Tang dynasty. The famous imperial concubine, Yang Guifei, is alleged to have abused it by having fresh lychees brought from the south to the capital (at Chang'an, modern Xi'an) in just a couple of days. This story is referred to by the great Tang poet, Du Mu, in one his works (Xiao Luofei *et al.* (eds) 1983: 1063). There was also an extremely similar system in operation under the Liao dynasty (Morgan 1986: 107). The jam was maintained by the Mongol military establishment, though the provision of horses and supplies was the responsibility of the local population (as a kind of tax). A network of relay stations, with horses and supplies, was set up all over the empire, each station being a day's journey from the next. Couriers riding on horseback carried messages from one station to the next, usually changing horses at each station. Urgent messages could be carried at an accelerated rate, couriers riding as fast as possible, changing to fresh horses regularly and even riding day and night. Marco says that, in this way, a message might be carried two or three hundred miles a day. This is roughly confirmed by a Persian source, Rashid al-Din (Morgan 1986: 104–6; MP/Latham: 154–5; MP/Hambis: 256–7). Despite abuses, this system seems to have worked well in the Yuan empire, if perhaps not always so well in the other Mongol khanates (Morgan 1986: 104, 106).

Despite Khubilai Khan's move of capital southward into China, his adoption of a Chinese dynastic title and increased 'sinicization' of the administrative system, he seems to have regarded the majority of his subjects in China with considerable distrust and to have resisted becoming too personally influenced by Chinese culture. He never learned the Chinese language well. The rebellion of the Chinese general Li Tan in 1262, referred to by Marco, probably increased this distrust. In 1268, all darughachi of Jurchen, Khitan or Chinese (Han) ethnicity were dismissed, though those who were Muslims (Huihui),[2] Uighurs, Naimans or Tanguts were left in office (YS: benji 6, 72). This was consistent with the general policy of preferring non-Chinese for government posts, particularly the highest offices. There was a graded system by which different groups of people were afforded preference in government appointments. Mongols ranked first, then those people called 'Se Mu' or 'Classified Peoples', followed by 'Han ren' (northern Chinese, former Jin subjects) and finally 'Nan ren' (southern Chinese, former subjects of Southern Song) (Morgan 1986: 127). It is interesting to note that Tanguts were included among the Classified Peoples while Jurchens and Khitans (at

least those who had been subjects of the Jin empire) were treated like Han ren. It must also be noted that, despite this system of preference, some ethnic Chinese achieved very high positions under Khubilai Khan, including not only Liu Bingzhong, who has already been mentioned, but also Dong Wenbing and Guo Shoujing. Guo worked on the regulation of the calendar and oversaw construction of the Grand Canal near Dadu, which was essential to the city's supply system (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 332; Yao Hanyuan 1997: 85). Dong's father had joined the Mongols and served in the armies in the final campaigns against the Jin empire. He was killed attacking Bianjing, the Jin capital. Wenbing also served in the Mongol armies, taking part in the campaign against Dali and assisting in the suppression of the rebellion of Li Tan. He then commanded an army in the final campaigns against Song (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 329; MP/Latham: 196; MP/Hambis: 327–8). The Mongols valued the services of Chinese soldiers. The famous Mongol general Ajul (Azhu or Ashu), son of Uriangkhadai and grandson of Sübötei, requested in 1268 that Chinese troops should be attached to his Mongol army. This, he said, was because the Mongols had great trouble attacking fortified positions, which the Chinese could often do successfully (YS: benji 6, 73). One probable reason for this is that the Chinese were using cannon at this period. A small gun has been archaeologically excavated in Manchuria, which is likely to date from no later than 1288 (Chase 2003: 32). A cannon bearing a date equivalent to 1332 still exists today in the collection of the Museum of Chinese History in Beijing (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 318). The official history of the Song dynasty, in the section on military affairs, mentions rockets (huojian) and what are very probably cannon (huopao), referring to the year 1274 (SS: zhi 150, 3317). There is evidence that cannon may, in fact, have been in use in China since as early as about 1128, and almost certainly no later than 1200 (Lu *et al.* 1988: 594–605; Chase 2003: 32). During Hülegü's campaign in Persia, Möngke supplied him with a thousand Chinese artillery crews to assist in attacks on walled cities (Christian 1998: 414). Since Central Asians were better at building large siege engines (trebuchets or mangonels) than the Chinese, it seems very likely that this Chinese artillery was rockets, cannon or both. In 1275, when a major battle was fought against Song forces during the course of the Mongol campaign in the lower Yangtze region, it was reported that 'the sound of pao reverberated over a hundred li' (YS: liezhuan 14, 1962). This could surely not have been said if these pao had been catapults of some kind, but implies that they were something much noisier, which must have been cannon. Again, in the attack which eventually led to the fall of Changzhou, the general Bayan is reported to have 'set up many huopao', almost certainly cannon (YS: liezhuan 14, 1964). Specialized artillery units were organized in the Yuan armies (YS: zhi 46, 1678). The small Chinese cannon of the time (the surviving cannon of 1332 has a bore of 10.5 cm or about 4 inches) would have been little use against massive walls, but could no doubt have inflicted severe damage on gates and

certainly on houses inside cities. They could have been set up and brought into action much more quickly than large trebuchets.

After the Mongol conquest of the Kingdom of Dali, Uriangkhadai had moved on into Annam, also called Jiaozhi Guo (now northern Vietnam). In 1257, he defeated the Annamese in battle and obtained their submission (YS: liezhuan 8, 1883; benji 3, 28). They seem to have been unwilling to make regular tribute payments to the Mongols, however, and during the 1280s there was further fighting between Mongol and Annamese forces. In 1278, the little kingdom of Champa (Zhancheng), south of Annam, also submitted, but by the end of the 1280s ceased to have regular contact with the Mongols (Jian Bozan *et al.* (eds) 1982: 499–505). In the 1260s, many of the peoples of Yunnan were still causing trouble and further campaigns were needed to subdue them. The Xifan (Tibetans of what is now western Sichuan) had also not been fully subjugated. In 1268, the general Mangghudai was ordered to take six thousand troops to pacify both them and the peoples of the area around modern Xichang (YS: benji 6, 72; Petech 1983: 185[3]). During the 1270s and 1280s, there was conflict between the Mongols and the Burmese, who mounted a major invasion of western Yunnan in 1277 but were heavily defeated. By 1287, Mongol forces had destroyed the Burmese Kingdom of Pagan (Jian Bozan *et al.* (eds) 1982: 499–504). Meanwhile, there was also fighting in Korea and the Mongols made two attempts to invade Japan. A large part of the territory of the Korean kingdom of Koryo was brought under direct Mongol rule in 1269 (Ledyard 1983: 325). Both the attempted invasions of Japan, in 1274 and 1281, were disastrous failures. In both cases, the weather played a large part in wrecking Mongol aims. The great expedition of 1281 was hit by a typhoon, the original 'divine wind' or kamikaze (Morgan 1986: 121).

The Mongols were generally tolerant of a diversity of religious faiths. Möngke is reported to have said that the Mongols believed that there was only one God but that 'just as God gave different fingers to the hand so he has given different ways to men' (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 195). The Khans seem often to have continued the shamanistic practices traditional in Mongolia. William of Rubruck, who visited Mongolia in 1254, describes the activities of the shamans and also how Möngke used the shoulder blades of sheep for divination (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 164, 197–201). Nestorian Christianity had also taken hold among some of the Mongols and other peoples of Mongolia before the period of the conquests. The mother of both Möngke and Khubilai was a Nestorian (Christian 1998: 394; Larner 1999: 14). Gradually, however, Buddhism became increasingly influential among the Mongols. Even in the Il-Khanate, it had a strong hold until a convert to Islam became Khan and decreed its suppression (Petech 1983: 183; Morgan 1986: 158–9). Khubilai also favoured Buddhism more than any other creed, but it was particularly the Tibetan, rather than any Chinese, form of Buddhism that seems to have had most appeal to the Mongols. Tibetan lamas were influential at the court of the Great Khan. The magic that they practised apparently made a great

impression. Khubilai took an interest in Tibetan Buddhism while he was still a prince. The famous Tibetan lama ‘Phags-pa entered his entourage as early as 1253. After 1256, he became more and more important to Khubilai, who used ‘Phags-pa as an instrument of his policy in Tibet after he became Great Khan. He also made him head of all the Buddhist clergy in his domains and had him devise a new system for writing the Mongol language. The ‘Phags-pa script came into use in 1269 and was compulsory in official documents (Petech 1983: 183–7). It never completely displaced the old Uighur script, however, and ultimately fell into disuse. The earlier way of writing Mongolian survived in the Mongolian Republic until the 1940s and is still in use in Inner Mongolia today (Bawden 1968: 344; Morgan 1986: 126). It seems that ‘Phags-pa also assisted the Mongols in their claim to world dominion, providing them with legitimacy by declaring that they belonged to the line of Buddhist c*hakravartin* rulers (Morgan 1986: 125).

In the two generations from Chinggis Khan to Khubilai, the Mongols came a very long way, both literally and figuratively. Their armies crossed Asia from one end to the other and penetrated to the centre of Europe. From being illiterate nomads they became rulers of the largest empire that has ever existed in Eurasia. Khubilai was perhaps the greatest of the Great Khans, comparatively enlightened and progressive, and also long-lived. His reign lasted from 1260 until 1294, when he died at the age of just under 80. Under his rule, China was able to recover from the afflictions of war and to regain a considerable degree of prosperity. Marco’s account of China at this period is a remarkable document of great value, when it is properly read and understood.

3 The journey and the writing of the book

According to the prologue of Marco Polo's book, members of his family twice made the long journey from Europe to the court of the Great Khan in the Far East. The first journey was undertaken by Marco's father, Niccolò, with his brother Maffeo. They reached the court of the Great Khan Khubilai (at an unspecified location) and were then sent back to Europe with a mission from the Khan to the Pope. When they arrived at the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, they found that there was no Pope, as the previous one had died and there was a long delay in electing a successor. So, they went home to Venice and waited. After some time, there still being no Pope, they set out again anyway, this time taking the young Marco with them. Shortly after beginning their journey, a new Pope was elected. They turned back to see him and then set off once more. After a very long, slow journey, they finally reached the Khan's court again. There they were well received. Marco made a very good impression on the Khan, who sent him on a mission to a distant country called Caragian (Karajang). Marco not only performed this mission well but also gave good descriptions to the Khan of all the remarkable things that he had seen during his journey. The Khan was very pleased and used him again thereafter for missions to distant places. Marco and his father and uncle stayed in the Far East for a long time, about seventeen years. Marco often travelled on missions for the Khan. They then became anxious to return to Venice, for they saw that the Khan was growing old and felt uncertain what might happen when he died. He refused to give them permission to leave, but eventually an opportunity for them to do so arose. The Il-Khan of Persia sent an embassy to Khubilai Khan to request a Mongol princess as bride, to replace his former wife who had died. The princess and her suite had to travel to Persia by sea, as the land routes were closed by war. Marco had recently made a journey by sea to India and, because of his experience, the ambassadors of the Persian Khan requested that he and his father and uncle should accompany them. The Great Khan reluctantly permitted this. They thus returned by ship to Persia and then by land to the eastern Mediterranean coast, from where they sailed to Venice. Not very long after their return, Marco was involved in a naval battle between the Venetians and the Genoese and was captured and held in Genoa.

There he met a Pisan called Rustichello (or something similar), who was also a prisoner. They collaborated on writing the book, in which Marco related a part of what he had learned during his travels.

This, in brief, is the story of the travels of Marco Polo, and of his father and uncle, of their stay in China, and of how they returned home and how Marco's book came to be written. It is apparently the story as he himself relates it. It is an extraordinary tale, but there is nothing in it that is utterly implausible. The dates that are assigned to various of the events in the story, which have all been omitted above, seem frequently to be wrong, though usually only by a few years. Times taken for the journeys between Europe and East Asia also often seem excessively long and a few details have been shown to be impossible. Overall, however, there does not seem to be any very obvious reason to entertain serious doubts about the account. In fact, in many ways it fits very well with historical facts. The names of rulers, mentioned at various points in the story, are correct for the period. There was indeed a very long delay, the longest on record, in electing a new Pope after the death of Clement IV in November 1268 (Larner 1999: 35). Agreement was not reached on his replacement until September 1271. This gives a narrow 'window' of less than three years for the return of Marco's father and uncle to Venice, their long wait for the election of a new Pope and their departure with Marco. The story fits well with this short possible period. The sending of a Mongol princess from China to marry the Khan of Persia is attested in both a Chinese and a Persian source and, again, the dates are at least very close to being right.

There is some problem about when and where exactly Marco might have become a prisoner of the Genoese. Most versions of his book do not specify any battle at which this occurred: only the edition of the book prepared by Ramusio and published in 1559 says that it was at the great sea-battle of Curzola. This battle took place in September 1298. It is likely that Marco, whenever exactly he was captured, was released following the conclusion of a peace treaty between Venice and Genoa in July 1299 (Larner 1999: 43–4). Doubts have been expressed about the capture at Curzola, but these do not seem to be very justified. It has been suggested that, if Marco was not captured until September 1298, he would have had little time to get to know Rustichello and work on the book with him. There is really no reason, however, why it could not have been finished after both Marco and Rustichello had been released. In any case, with little else to do while they were captives, they might have completed an initial version of the text in just a few months.

It has been suggested that the collaboration between Marco and Rustichello was a fiction, devised by Rustichello for his own purposes (Wehr 1993: 299–326). There appears, however, to be no very solid evidence for this hypothesis, which has already been convincingly dismissed (Larner 1999: 52–6; 210n). There is little point in repeating the arguments here. It is worth emphasizing, though, how difficult it would have been for such a fabrication

to have remained undetected in the very small world of the Italian city states of the period. The population of Europe then was a fraction of what it is now. Large European cities had populations of a few tens of thousands, perhaps 100,000 at the most. Everyone who was anyone knew just about everyone else who was anyone, if not personally, then at least by hearsay. If Rustichello had concocted such a fiction, then it is very unlikely indeed that it could have failed to be denounced.

Another highly persuasive argument in favour of accepting that the book originated as a collaborative project is that this explains a great deal about its content. It was probably Rustichello who decided to write a *Description of the World* (*Divisament dou Monde*, as the book seems originally to have been entitled), rather than an account principally devoted to the Great Khan and China. Marco had, after all, spent by far the greater part of his time away from Venice in China (unless one accepts the view, to be discussed below, that he never went to China at all). If he had written the book alone or with a different collaborator, the whole plan and content of the book would probably have been different. Marco had, for example, travelled eastwards by land to China only once, some 25 years before the book came to be written. Surely he would have passed over this outward journey more briefly, if Rustichello had not desired to write an account of as much as possible of that part of the world that was then more or less unknown in Europe, but with which Marco was acquainted. It is, indeed, very noticeable that this section of the book is confused and that Marco's actual itinerary is impossible to follow in any detail, with frequent digressions to describe places that were probably not on his route and that Marco had never seen personally. The confusion is scarcely surprising when it is borne in mind that, not only was Marco recalling experiences of half a lifetime earlier, but that, when he made this journey, he was young and had no particular reason to keep systematic notes of what he saw. Once Marco reaches Kashgar, close to the edge of the domains of the Great Khan, his itineraries become very much clearer and it is possible to follow them with considerable precision, as will be shown below. It is probably also because the book was actually written by Rustichello, and not by Marco himself, that it is so impersonal. In this context, it is interesting to compare the book with Poggio Bracciolini's account of the travels of Nicolò de' Conti (Poggio and Ludovico 1963: 6–38), who voyaged in the East (though little, if at all, in China) for more than twenty years during the early 1400s. Poggio allows virtually nothing of Nicolò to appear in the text. Almost all that readers learn about him is that, in Poggio's opinion, he seemed to be truthful. Poggio and Rustichello were, of course, very different kinds of writers, but they both applied their own filters to the material from their sources.

Another probable reason why Marco's account is so impersonal is that Marco may have felt that there were things about his life in the East that he needed to hide. This was not an age of religious tolerance in Europe. Marco had spent a long time living and working among non-Christians and

Christians such as the Nestorians, who were considered heretics in Catholic Europe. It seems that he had colleagues who were Muslims and with whom he was on good terms (Larner 1999: 103–4; MP/Latham: 89; MP/Hambis: 149–50). He also appears to have taken a relaxed attitude towards Buddhism (MP/Latham: 199; MP/Hambis: 332; Larner 1999: 75–7). In the climate of the times in Europe, it could have been positively dangerous for Marco to have expressed his religious opinions too freely. There is another question, too, about which Marco remains silent, perhaps with very good reason. He was young and unmarried when he arrived in China. He claimed to have gained favour with Khubilai Khan and to have undertaken a number of missions for him during a period of some seventeen or eighteen years. It was a Mongol custom to reward faithful followers with women. It must be very likely that the Khan would have wanted to see Marco suitably matched. If the Great Khan proposed to marry Marco to some young Mongol woman, it would surely have been very difficult indeed to refuse. Among Marco's possessions, inventoried after his death in 1324, was the headdress of a Tartar lady (called 'bochta', derived from the Mongol word 'bogtak'), adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls (Larner 1999: 45; Olschki 1960: 106). It has been suggested that he might have been given this as a keepsake by the Mongol princess with whom the Polos made their return journey as far as Persia (Olschki 1960: 106). This is surely impossible. It may have been common enough for Oriental sovereigns to confer items of personal clothing as a mark of especial esteem (Olschki 1960: 106n), but this was between men. For a young woman, about to be married to a prince who was shortly to become Il-Khan, to give such a very personal item as a headdress to another man would surely have been almost equivalent to committing adultery. The headdress in Marco's possession must have been a keepsake from someone else, some other woman with whom he had been closely intimate while in China, and someone whom he wished always to remember, for he kept the headdress for the rest of his life. The likelihood is that it was a parting gift from his wife. There can of course be no certainty about this, but it is surely not unlikely that Marco married during the long time that he was in China.[1] This is certainly something that he would have wished to keep quiet about once back in Venice.

Another sign that the book comes from two originators are the occasional passages where Marco suddenly makes, as it were, a personal appearance. Usually these passages include the phrase 'I, Marco'. An example is when Marco talks of finding a ring by consulting certain idols that could discover lost property: 'By this means I, Marco, found a ring that I had lost' (MP/Latham: 198–9; MP/Hambis: 330–2). It is significant that this particular passage occurs only in one manuscript of the book, one of a very small number of longer versions of the text. It seems likely that, after Marco and Rustichello had finished working together on the original version of the book, Marco himself (or someone else under Marco's direction) made additions to it. Thus, two quite distinct major groups of texts came into existence.



Figure 3.1 A statue of Buddha dating from the period of the late Southern Song dynasty at Baoding Shan near Dazu in Sichuan province.

The majority of surviving copies of the book are derived from the earlier, shorter version of the text (these are often referred to as the 'A' group). At least some of this group may have had some additional material inserted before they began to circulate, but in the main they probably differ little from the text as originally completed. The second group ('B') includes only the important manuscript kept in Toledo and the edition of the book published in 1559 by Giambattista Ramusio, as well as a couple of fragments (Larner 1999: 58, 184–5). The manuscript on which Ramusio based his printed version of the book has disappeared, but it was clearly in many ways similar to the Toledo manuscript. Each of these, however, contains material not in the

other. These longer versions must surely be the result of Marco going back to the original and making additions to it, and probably also deletions from it, when Rustichello had included content that was not accurate. Since Rustichello wrote the book in French (or rather an Italianized version of French) and not in Marco's own Venetian tongue, Marco may well have had some difficulty in understanding exactly what Rustichello had written down.

Without Rustichello, would Marco ever have written a book at all? We know today of travellers who visited the East at this period and left no account of their journeys (Larner 1999: 117–18). Marco must have found it very difficult to organize all his knowledge and set it down in writing. He had, after all, been away from Venice for more than half his life. It must have been almost a foreign land to him when he returned to it. Even if he had not forgotten how to speak his native Venetian dialect (as Ramusio suggested he almost had), he may have found it hard to write in a European language. Did he even want to write a book? There is really nothing to suggest that he did, apart from the statement in some versions of the book itself that Marco thought 'that it would be a great pity if he did not have a written record made of all the things he had seen and had heard by true report . . .' (MP/Latham: 33; MP/Hambis: 40). Marco may well have thought this in a rather vague way, or it may have been an invention by Rustichello. Whether Marco really had any strong impulse to have his story set down in writing is unclear. It is also said in the book (Ramusio's version) that he never expected to be able to leave China and go back to Europe, so he surely could not have had any definite plan to write about his experiences very much in advance of his return (MP/Latham: 34; MP/Hambis: 40). This makes it highly unlikely that, as has been suggested (Larner 1999: 58), he brought back notes and other material specifically to enable him to write a book. It must be much more likely that Marco brought back with him things that would help him to keep alive his memories of his life in China. Perhaps he also hoped, at least at first, that he would one day be able to return and that he therefore carried with him material that would be useful in that event. The writing of the book may well have been more or less accidental. It is easy to imagine, however, that Marco liked to talk about his experiences during his long period abroad. His life after his return to Venice does not seem to have been very exciting (Larner 1999: 44). Probably he felt great nostalgia for his former life in China and thought and talked about it often. No doubt there were those who, having listened to his stories, suggested that he should write a book. This may have been how the idea first came to Marco. Not being a particularly literary man, he needed help with the writing. His chance meeting with Rustichello and the enforced idleness of captivity provided the ideal opportunity for the book to be created.

Whatever material Marco may have had in his possession to assist his memory, it is very noticeable that the later sections of the book are much more detailed and accurate than the earlier part dealing with the outward journey. Marco probably did have notes of some kind that helped him to

recall his experiences. If he is to be believed (and I believe, for reasons that will become clear later, that he is), then many of the journeys that he made around China, and as far at least as India, were undertaken on behalf of the Great Khan, to whom he gave detailed reports about what he had seen after his return (MP/Latham: 41; MP/Hambis: 58–9). Presumably, then, Marco made notes during his journeys in order to help him when he reported to the Khan. It must surely be these notes that he kept and used later during the writing of the book. This is very important with regard to what Marco includes and omits from his account. What he particularly notices are those things that he knew would be of interest to Khubilai Khan: other things he passes over. Thus, he talks of the wealth of the cities of southern China, for no doubt the Khan liked to hear how rich his empire was. He rarely fails to mention wine and curious sexual customs. The Mongol Khans are known to have been great drinkers and to have enjoyed sexual indulgence, or even over-indulgence. The Chinese Daoist known as Changchun (whose real name was Qiu Chuji) is reported to have advised Chinggis Khan to sleep alone from time to time, if he wished to prolong his life (Morgan 1986: 71; Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 321). The early deaths of most of the Great Khans before Khubilai are commonly ascribed to drinking too much. Marco also says much about birds and animals, for the Mongol Khans, as Marco also makes clear, loved to hunt. If Marco fails to mention many things that modern commentators think he ought to have described, such as Chinese writing and tea-drinking, this is surely because these things were too commonplace and uninteresting for the ears of the Great Khan. Marco was no doubt himself strongly 'Mongolized' after living with the Mongols for so many years, but the fact that he was making notes during his journeys for his reports to Khubilai must have ensured a very strong bias in what he noticed and, later, included in the book.

There has been a suggestion, which seems to have gained some credence, that Marco cannot have personally undertaken the journeys that he describes in southern China (Haeger 1979: 22–30; Wood 1995: 138; Larner 1999: 65–7). The great detail in which he describes the Khan's court, and the ceremonies there, is contrasted with his descriptions of southern China, mainly rather repetitious and colourless. This hypothesis suggests that Marco, and his father and uncle, did go to China, but only as far as Khanbalikh or Dadu (modern Beijing), and that Marco relied on what he heard there for his account of southern China. This seems to me to be untenable. For one thing, Marco does, in fact, give great detail about the city of Hangzhou. There is also much more accuracy in his accounts of the south than has previously been appreciated (as will be shown below). If the cities of the south are mentioned very briefly and in a formulaic fashion, then surely this is because Marco merely passed through most of them in the course of his journeys. He did not spend much time in each place and could not, therefore, acquire any detailed knowledge. On the other hand, he was clearly based at the court of the Great Khan and spent much of his long time in

China there. Obviously, then, he must have come to be very familiar with everything that went on there. The comparative detail, or lack of it, in his accounts of the north and south is, therefore, exactly what should be expected. There is nevertheless sufficient accurate detail in his description of the south to make it very unlikely that he was relying on hearsay. Very often it has been the difficulties that commentators have experienced in identifying the places that Marco mentions, and in following his routes, that has given rise to the idea that he could not have been recounting personal experiences. Such difficulties have, however, usually been the result of failings on the part of the commentators and not because Marco got things wrong. It will be shown below that his account of the itinerary from Khanbalikh to Yunnan, Myanmar and Annam is so good (and so much better than has ever previously been appreciated) that he almost certainly undertook it himself. Moreover, if it can be accepted that the Polos left China in the way and by the route that they claim, as most commentators seem to believe (Larner 1999: 67), then Marco must also have made the journey from Khanbalikh to Quanzhou (Çaiton or Zaiton) that he describes. As he offers a long and detailed account of Hangzhou, which is on this route, it can surely also be accepted that he had been there several times, as he claims (MP/Latham: 213n; MP/Hambis: 356). The wealth of accurate detail which Marco gives throughout his descriptions of the Mongols and of China also makes it seem unlikely in the extreme that he never visited China at all. This hypothesis (Wood 1995: passim.) really has absolutely no basis. It has already been more or less comprehensively demolished by one of the greatest authorities on Marco Polo and the Yuan dynasty (De Rachewiltz 1997: passim, 1998: 177). I shall show below that many of the supposed problems that have caused Marco to be doubted are only problems to those who have done inadequate research. It is in fact perfectly possible to identify with certainty or near certainty all but a very few of the places in China that Marco mentions. The details that he gives regarding plants, animals and people are almost invariably highly accurate. Comparison with other accounts of China from roughly the same period show Marco's to be the most detailed and reliable of all.

The story of the travels of the Polo family in Asia is a remarkable one. Marco's own personal story is really less extraordinary than that of his father and uncle, who travelled from Europe to China and back not just once, like Marco, but twice. Their first journey must also have been something of a pioneering enterprise, for we are told that the Great Khan had never before seen any Latins (MP/Latham: 35; MP/Hambis: 44; Larner 1999: 34). Europeans had certainly visited Karakorum in Mongolia before, but probably not since the unity of the Mongol empire had collapsed in 1260. It was, indeed, partly because of a war between the Il-Khan and the successor of Batu (in what had become known as the Khanate of the Golden Horde) that the elder Polos began their journey to the East.

It is worthwhile to set their travels within their historical context. In 1204, the Fourth Crusade turned aside from its original objectives in the Holy

Land and attacked and took Constantinople. The Venetians were heavily involved in this, as they had provided the ships for the Crusade. They benefited very greatly from the conquest of the city and were effectively more powerful there than the nominal Latin Emperor who was set upon the throne (Keen 1968: 132). Subsequently, the Venetians maintained a colony in Constantinople, which was a base for trade in the eastern Mediterranean region and across the Black Sea. The Polo family took part in this trade (Larner 1999: 32–3). They had a house in the Crimean port of Soldaia (now Sudak), on the northern shore of the Black Sea. At some time before 1260, Niccolò and Maffeo went to Soldaia to engage in trade. After they had been there for some time (the book does not specify how long), they decided that it might well be very profitable to travel into the lands of the Golden Horde. So they left Soldaia and journeyed to the court of Berke Khan. Berke, a younger brother of Batu, was the fourth Khan of the Golden Horde. He reigned from 1257 until 1266.

While the Polos were at his court, a momentous event occurred that was almost certainly the basic cause of their eventual journey to the Far East. In 1261, Constantinople was retaken by the Greeks, with the assistance of the Venetians' enemies, the Genoese (Keen 1968: 179; Larner 1999: 33). This event is not mentioned by Marco, probably because, as he and Rustichello were writing as prisoners in Genoa, it would have been highly inadvisable to do so. With the enemies of Venice in control of Constantinople, and therefore of the straits leading from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, the Polos could not return by the way they had come. They had to try to find another route back to Venice. Their luck was bad, for in 1262 war broke out between the Khan of the Golden Horde and the Il-Khan. The focus of this war was the Caucasus region, which was held by the Il-Khanate but claimed by the Golden Horde. This ruled out another possible route, south between the Black Sea and the Caspian to Lesser Armenia (in what is today south-east Turkey). Lesser Armenia had a port on the Mediterranean coast where it would have been possible to take ship for Venice. The Polos seem to have decided to journey further to the east, perhaps hoping to be able to travel southwards on the eastern side of the Caspian Sea and then to turn west towards Lesser Armenia. They eventually reached Bukhara, where, the books says, they found themselves stuck for three years. The ruler of the region (the Chaghadai Khanate) is said to have been Barak. In fact, it is unlikely that he was Khan when the Polos arrived in Bukhara, though he probably was before they left. He ruled from 1266 until 1271. Most likely the Polos were in Bukhara until 1266 or early 1267. The reason for them being unable to move in any direction from this city must have been the unsettled state of the area at the time, partly as a result of the civil war between Khubilai and Arigh Böke and the rise of the power of Khaidu, and partly because there were three Khans of the Chaghadai Khanate who ruled in rapid succession during 1266. It is possible that they were in some danger, or at least felt themselves to be in danger, during their enforced stay in Bukhara.

The two Polo brothers were saved from this predicament by the arrival of an envoy of the Il-Khan on a mission to the Great Khan Khubilai. He was intrigued to find two southern Europeans in Bukhara and offered to take them onward to the court of the Great Khan, who, he said, had never seen any 'Latins'. This may have been an offer that was almost impossible to refuse, but in any case, the brothers were very possibly glad of any chance to be able to move on. Thus, probably some time in 1267, they arrived at the court of Khubilai Khan (which at that time would most likely have been at Shangdu, though the Khan might have been hunting at one of his other residences). There they were well received. The Khan questioned them and decided to send them back to Europe as his emissaries to the Pope. They must have left on the return journey late in 1267, for by April 1269 they were back at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. The book says that the journey took them three years. This may be simple exaggeration, in order to make it seem that the Polos had faced great difficulties in their travels. It is also possible, however, that Marco and Rustichello used inclusive reckoning when calculating spans of time. This was formerly a common system in southern Europe. It is the reason why the French still refer to a week as 'huit jours' and a fortnight as 'quinze jours': the first day is counted as well as the last. Even more relevantly, the Italians also say 'quindici giorni', meaning a fortnight. By this system, if the Polos left Shangdu in 1267 and reached Acre in 1269, then this was three years (counting 1267 as the first year). However, it is really not very profitable to become too involved in discussing the accuracy of numbers given in Marco's book. First, they were very easily corrupted by copyists, to whom the figures were more or less meaningless. Most large numbers in the manuscripts were in roman numerals, which are even easier to misread and miswrite than Arabic figures. Secondly, absolute accuracy was simply not a serious concern of the medieval mind, especially in southern Europe. The concept of scientific precision scarcely developed in Europe before the eighteenth century, and then mainly in the north of the continent. Marco (and Rustichello) probably did not bother too much about getting figures exactly right. Their contemporary readers would not have expected them to do so.

It has already been said above that the period during which the two elder Polos were back in Europe coincided quite precisely with the longest interregnum between Popes on record. Their return journey, this time with Marco, must have begun shortly before the election of Pope Gregory X in September 1271. Hearing the news of his election while they were in Lesser Armenia, they turned back to Acre to see him. They then set out again. By this time, it must have been almost the end of 1271. It has been claimed that their return journey to the Far East could not have followed the route that has usually been deduced from the rather confused information in the book, that such a route lay 400 miles south of the main Silk Road and involved crossing very mountainous and difficult terrain (Larner 1999: 69). This argument, however, ignores the fact that there was never any single Silk

Road, but always several different possible routes. It also fails to take into account factors other than mere geography, that the Polos had perforce to consider, of which the most important was war. It seems that, having had problems further north on their first outward journey, the elder Polos decided to look for a safer route that would completely avoid the zones of warfare between the Khanates. After 1268, there was conflict in eastern Turkestan between the forces of Khaidu and those of Khubilai. The Chaghadai Khanate supported Khaidu, while the Il-Khans of Persia maintained good relations with the Great Khan. The Polos would seem, therefore, to have made the sensible decision to try to return to the court of Khubilai Khan by crossing the territory of the Il-Khan and avoiding the lands of the Chaghadai Khan and Khaidu. This could be done by travelling south-eastwards across Persia and taking ship from the Persian Gulf to China, via India and South-east Asia. This would seem to have been their plan. On reaching Hormuz (then situated on the mainland near modern Bandar-e Abbas), they found that the only ships available were, in their eyes, unseaworthy. 'Their ships are very bad, and many of them founder . . .' (MP/Latham: 66; MP/Hambis: 105). They then found out that there was a possible land route that would avoid the main areas of conflict and could be considered safe. So they abandoned their original intention, left Hormuz, and turned towards the north-east. From the information that Marco gives about the Hormuz area, it may be that the Polos spent a whole winter there. 'They sow their wheat and barley and other grains in November, and they have got in all their harvest before the end of March' (MP/Latham: 67; MP/Hambis: 106). This may have been in the hope that Chinese or other good ships would arrive in the port and offer them passage, or because they did not want to travel in winter, or simply because it took time to discover an alternative route. The continuation of their journey, although it involved crossing some difficult, mountainous terrain, kept them in areas where the power of the Chaghadai Khanate was clearly very limited or non-existent. They may again have been delayed by the necessity to wait for the right season to cross the high Pamir, which they surely could not have done in winter. Marco also refers to being ill while in Badakhshan (Badascian), for as long as a year according to some versions of the text (MP/Latham: 77–8; MP/Hambis: 123–4). Eventually the Polos descended to Kashgar, from where they soon entered territory that was firmly under the control of the Great Khan. Again, however, their choice of the route to the south of the Tarim Basin may have been influenced by the desire to avoid areas to the north where Khaidu's troops might have been operating. It was better to have to cross the Desert of Lop than to risk such an encounter. Having probably left Lesser Armenia at the end of 1271 or very early in 1272 and taken 'three and a half years' to complete their journey, they must have arrived in China in 1274 or 1275. The return of the Polos by ship to Persia and then on to Venice has already been touched upon. Its dates are known from other sources and conform to those given by Marco. The departure from China

took place in 1292, some 17 or 18 years after Marco had arrived there. By 1294, he was in Persia. After some time there, the Polos continued their homeward journey, reaching Venice in 1295. Khubilai Khan had died during the previous year. Marco never went back.

Clearly, if Marco fabricated the story of his and his relatives' journeys to and from China, then he did an amazingly good job. There may be a few details, of little importance, that are not quite right in his account, but in general it fits impressively well with known historical facts. It seems very improbable that anyone could have mendaciously invented such an account without making any serious and obvious mistakes. In any case, there is good testimony to Marco's reliability and truthfulness. During his lifetime, in about 1310, the Dominican friar, Francesco Pipino, was ordered by his religious superiors to make a translation of the book into Latin. The Dominicans apparently took the book very seriously and thought of it as potentially useful to missionary work. In his introduction to the translation, Francesco expressly declares that Marco Polo is 'a most respectable, veracious and devout person' and that his father, also a highly respectable person, had corroborated Marco's account. Perhaps most tellingly of all, he tells his readers that Marco's uncle, Maffeo, told his confessor while on his deathbed that everything in the book was true (Larner 1999: 111–12). Marco was also consulted by a professor at the University of Padua, Pietro d'Abano, about such matters as whether the equatorial regions could be inhabited by humans. Some of his observations were included in a book which Pietro completed in 1303 (Larner 1999: 44; Olschki 1960: 34–6). Again, the contemporary chronicler, Jacopo d'Acqui, testifies to his veracity (Larner 1999: 114–15). In the face of all these testimonials in Marco's favour, it seems unreasonable to entertain serious doubts about his truthfulness. In the next few chapters, it will be shown that Marco's accounts of his journeys within China and of what he saw there are considerably more accurate and credible than has previously been appreciated.

4 No Great Wall?

Marco has been much criticized for his omissions, for failing to mention aspects of China that his critics have expected him to have noticed. What seems usually to have been regarded as the most serious of these omissions is his failure to say anything at all about the Great Wall of China. There is a counter-argument, that the Wall simply did not exist in Marco's time, but this has not always been given credence (Wood 1995: 96–101). It is worth examining something of the history of the Great Wall in order to re-evaluate this controversy. The origins of the building of long defensive walls in China go back to the period of the Warring States, several centuries BCE. One of the earliest walls to be built, in about 450 BCE, was between the state of Qi (in modern Shandong) and its south-eastern neighbours. Numerous walls followed during the next two centuries, several of them along China's northern borders (Needham 1954: 92). After the various states of the period had all been conquered by the famous First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (Qin Shi Huangdi), these northern walls were linked to form the original Great Wall, completed in about 214 BCE (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 41–2). It was kept in good repair, and extended to the west, during the succeeding Han dynasty. Thereafter, it was at least partially rebuilt at various periods until the Sui dynasty (581–618). After this, however, it was neglected for centuries. The Tang dynasty, which followed the Sui, at first extended its power well beyond the line of the Great Wall, which therefore became redundant. When the boundaries of the Tang empire were pushed back during the eighth century by the Tibetans and Uighurs, it was too weak to undertake such a major project as the reconstruction of the Wall. After the fall of Tang, the small states of the Five Dynasties period were also in no position to try to rebuild the Wall. The Song empire never managed to take control of the former northern border regions (see Chapter 1) and could therefore not contemplate major wall building.

The Jin dynasty, however, did undertake some work on northern defensive walls. In 1200, a wall was completed on the north-western borders of the Jin empire (JS: benji 11, 168). This was, however, well away from the line of any of the former Great Walls (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 52). I have personally seen remnants of Jin dynasty Great Wall and they are not very impressive.



Figure 4.1 A section of ruinous Great Wall built of compacted earth during the Han dynasty, about two thousand years ago, in the desert near Dunhuang (Shazhou).

The Jin wall was on a much smaller scale than the Wall as it is usually seen now. It seems, though, mainly to have been constructed in stone. Other early Great Walls were, in very large part, built of nothing more solid than compacted soil. This can be very durable in the generally dry climate of northern China, but, in areas where there was much human habitation, structures of this kind were very liable to be destroyed by the removal of soil to be used for spreading on fields or as building material. Today, very little remains of most of the earlier Great Walls. As it is usually seen now, and as it is generally imagined, the Great Wall of China was constructed during the Ming dynasty, after Marco's time. It was, in fact, built to keep the Mongols out of China, after they had been expelled in 1368. There certainly must have been remnants of ruinous Great Wall in existence when Marco was in China, but they were very probably not very impressive. For someone who had seen many large walled cities, they may well not have been at all noteworthy.

Marco was by no means alone in failing to notice the Great Wall of China. In fact, not one of the several European travellers who visited the Far East during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and left an account of their travels, makes any mention of it. John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck might be excused for this omission, on the grounds that they only went as far as Mongolia and never crossed the line of the Wall. John was there as an emissary of the Pope during 1246. William travelled as a missionary and spent time in Mongolia, including Karakorum, in the years

1253–4. Both heard reports of China, but these do not seem to have included any information about the Great Wall. More significant is the failure of both Giovanni Marignolli and Odoric of Pordenone to say anything about it (Larner 1999: 59). By his own account, Odoric spent three years in Khanbalikh (Beijing) (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 244). This was during the 1320s. It would scarcely be possible to spend as long as three days in Beijing today without becoming aware of the existence of the Great Wall. Giovanni, who travelled to China in the 1340s, crossed the line of the Wall but apparently did not notice it. It seems, however, that it made no impression on the European mind until well after Marco's time. It does not appear to be mentioned by any early European writer, excepting possibly Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 360), but even his reference is obscure and uncertain (Needham 1954: 185). The earliest definite notice in any European work dates from the end of the sixteenth century (Larner 1999: 59). This, of course, was after the Ming dynasty Wall had been built. It may also be that large defensive walls became more of a curiosity to the European mind after the development of heavy cannon made such walls more or less obsolete in Europe. There were, after all, European precedents for long walls, such as Hadrian's Wall in Britain. Though this was not on the scale of the Great Wall of China, the concept was essentially the same.

It has sometimes been said that Marco's near-contemporary travellers do mention the Wall (Dawson (ed.) 1964: 5). This seems to be based on an apparent reference to the Great Wall by the North African traveller, Ibn Battuta, who was in China in about the year 1346. In fact, however, what Ibn Battuta says is that, while in Sin Kalan (Guangzhou), he made enquiries about 'the Wall of Gog and Magog' (or 'Yajuj and Majuj', as they were called in Arabic). He had apparently heard of such a wall somewhere in or near China, presumably before he arrived there. It is probable that Arab visitors to China during the eighth and ninth centuries heard of the Great Wall (the Sui dynasty Wall would then still have been in reasonably good condition) and equated it with the legendary 'Wall of Gog and Magog'. This had supposedly been built by Alexander the Great somewhere in the East to prevent the wild tribes (or, in some versions of the legend, giants) called Gog and Magog from invading the civilized world. It seems strange that anyone should have imagined that this Alexandrine wall should still have existed some one and a half thousand years after it was allegedly built, but it seems that the Alexander legends maintained a strong hold on the minds of both Europeans and Arabs during the Middle Ages. What is significant here, however, is that when Ibn Battuta asked about such a wall while he was in China, he could find no one who had either seen it or who knew of anyone who had seen it (Ibn Battuta 1982: 326–7; Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: 265). Since he mixed mainly with fellow Muslims while in China, many of whom must have been merchants who would no doubt have travelled widely in the Yuan empire, this is strong evidence for the fact that no very noticeable Great Wall existed at the period. It is entirely

unreasonable to criticize Marco for failing to mention something that no near-contemporary visitor to China gained any knowledge of, even when they made specific enquiries about it. In fact, nobody appears to have noticed Marco's failure to mention the Great Wall until 1652 (Larner 1999: 172). The near-obsession of Europeans with the Great Wall of China does not seem to have begun until the eighteenth century. It was undoubtedly given strong impetus by the apparently general belief that the Wall as seen then (the Ming dynasty Wall) was the original Wall of Qin Shi Huangdi. The Jesuit missionaries who were in China from near the end of the Ming dynasty until 1775 probably originated this belief, referring to the Wall in their letters (which were published and widely circulated during the eighteenth century) as if it were almost two thousand years old (Vissière (eds) 2001: 211). The first British ambassador to the Qing empire, Lord George Macartney, who was in China in 1793–4, certainly appears to have believed that the Wall as he was able to examine it at Gubeikou, north of Beijing, dated from 'above two hundred years before the Christian era' (Cranmer-Byng (ed.) 1962: 112). Naturally, seen in this light, the Wall seemed an extraordinary structure. It is undoubtedly because of this later conception of the Great Wall of China, as perhaps the most outstanding monument of Chinese civilization, that Marco came to be so damningly judged. Such a judgement derives, however, from an entirely anachronistic point of view.

The same is very probably true of the criticism of Marco because he does not mention the binding of women's feet. This criticism is sharpened by the fact that Odoric notes it, if only briefly (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 251). Odoric is, however, the only visitor to China during the Yuan dynasty who does (Levy n.d.: 48). It is particularly significant that Ibn Battuta fails to say anything about it, for he seems to have copulated his way around the world with a succession of temporary wives and slave-girls, many of whom he made pregnant. He specifically states that, while he was in China, he was given two slave-girls by a fellow Muslim who was resident there. This man had no less than one hundred slaves, fifty male and fifty female (Ibn Battuta 1982: 331; Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: 268). Ibn Battuta also states that it was easy and cheap to buy slave-girls and easy for a foreign merchant to marry in China (Ibn Battuta 1982: 321–2; Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: 263–4). He must have had sexual relations with at least some women while he was in China and could hardly have failed to notice if their feet had been bound. It is strange indeed that the Franciscan monk, Odoric, should have noticed footbinding while Ibn Battuta did not! The likelihood is that the custom was much less widespread then than it became later and that it was largely confined to women of the upper classes. At this period, too, it was a fairly new practice and was almost certainly much less extreme than it subsequently became. It has been suggested that the feet were not bound so tightly as to be noticeable to a foreigner (Levy n.d.: 40–1, 46, 48). Footbinding does not seem to have occurred at all before the tenth century and is reported not to have been widely practised before about 1070 (Gernet 1962: 127, 141n;

Levy n.d.: 40). It is improbable that any non-Chinese peoples took it up: it is well known, for example, that Manchu women very rarely bound their feet, even after the Qing dynasty had been established in China for more than two centuries. The ancestors of the Manchus, the Jurchens, are highly unlikely to have adopted the practice. This may well mean that it was uncommon in north China in Marco's time, shortly after the conquest of the former Jin empire by the Mongols. It is particularly unlikely to have become established in the area around Khanbalikh, which was under Khitan rule from 938, when footbinding had scarcely begun. Marco, of course, spent much of his time in China in Khanbalikh. During the Ming dynasty, which followed the Yuan, measures had to be taken to stop Chinese from imitating the Mongols. Many had, it seems, taken to wearing Mongol clothing and even to speaking Mongolian. The first Ming emperor issued an edict in 1368 forbidding the wearing of Mongol clothes and hairstyle and the use of the Mongolian language. As late as 1491, such practices had not died out in Beijing, where at least some people were reported to be 'wont to wear barbarian clothes and to speak the barbarian language' (Serruys 1959: 130–1). If this was the case, it must surely be that many north Chinese under the Jin and Yuan dynasties left their daughters' feet unbound. Even during the early nineteenth century, the practice was not universal. It was reported in 1835 that 'five to eight out of every ten females had bound feet, depending on locality' (Levy n.d.: 52). The average must have been somewhere around six or seven out of ten, so that about one-third of Chinese women never had bound feet. Marco does describe (though only in the Toledo manuscript) how daintily the young women of China walked, taking very short steps, but he does not ascribe this to the binding of their feet (MP/Latham: 197; MP/Hambis: 329–30). It may well be that, in many cases, women with unbound feet imitated the gait of those whose feet were bound, complicating the issue for an outsider. Since Odoric mentions footbinding, it could be that this really is an omission on Marco's part, but it is just as possible that the practice was neither so common nor so extreme at the period as to be very noticeable.

Another thing which Odoric describes, but that Marco does not, is fishing with cormorants. This is something that ought to have been very noteworthy. There is, however, some question as to how widespread it was in Marco's time. Odoric's account seems to indicate that he was being shown something unusual or novel. He did not see people fishing with cormorants in the course of his journey, but was invited by someone with whom he stayed to go to watch fish being caught in this way. Surely, if this had been a normal method of fishing in the area, there would have been little reason for such an invitation. Unfortunately, Odoric does not say where he witnessed this. It seems to have been somewhere between Fuzhou and Hangzhou, but he refers only to 'a city' on 'a certain great river' (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 238). This is a great pity, for Odoric's description of this practice appears to be one of only very few references to it from the period before the late Ming dynasty. In fact, I have been able to trace only two in any pre-Ming Chinese

works. One is in a poem by Du Fu (712–70): 'Every household keeps cormorants: there is fish with every meal.' This is quoted in the great pharmacopoeia written by Li Shizhen during the late sixteenth century, the *Bencao Gangmu* (BCGM: 2577). It is the only quote he gives referring to the practice. This is highly significant, for Li Shizhen was very thorough in his researches. The great official pharmacopoeia of the Song dynasty, printed in 1249, includes an entry on cormorants (cormorant guano was used medicinally), but quotes no references at all to using them for fishing (ZHBC: 404). According to quotes given in this work and by Li Shizhen, during the period up to about the middle of the eighth century, it was believed that cormorants did not lay eggs, but produced their young from their beaks. Such a belief probably arose when cormorants were observed feeding their young by regurgitating fish. It could hardly have persisted if they were widely and commonly domesticated before that period. As the earliest reference to fishing with cormorants comes also from about 750, it may well be that the practice is not very ancient but began during the eighth century, or perhaps a little earlier.

The other pre-Yuan reference to fishing with cormorants occurs in the *Meng Xi Bi Tan*, by Shen Kuo (1033–97). He discusses the quote from Du Fu already referred to, gives another quotation (from a book which appears to be no longer extant) and says that he himself has seen cormorants used for fishing in Shu (Sichuan). Du Fu seems to have been referring to fishing with cormorants in the region of the Yangtze Gorges: the second quotation also refers to that area and to Sichuan (MXBT: juan 16, 117). Shen Kuo was born in Hangzhou. He rose to high government office at the time of Wang Anshi's reforms, in the 1070s. At various times throughout his life, he lived and worked in different regions of China, including modern Anhui, Jiangsu, Hubei and Zhejiang provinces (MXBT: 1; Needham 1954: 135–9; Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 253–4). He therefore had the opportunity to observe activities in many areas (and he was clearly very observant). If he mentions fishing with cormorants only in Sichuan, then this may well indicate that, during his lifetime, it was more or less confined to that region (and perhaps to adjacent western Hubei, as the Yangtze Gorges extend through both provinces). It was certainly practised in many other areas later. It is referred to during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on the lakes along the Grand Canal (mainly in Shandong and Jiangsu) and in Ningbo (Davis 1857: ii, 288, 343), as well as near Hanchuan in Hubei (Huc 1859: 335, 2001: 927). Li Shizhen also says that it was widespread in wet regions of China in his time, the late sixteenth century (BCGM: 2577). It seems probable, however, that it only became so widespread during the Ming dynasty. Movements of population during the two centuries up to and including the period of the Mongol conquest of China were generally from the dry north to the wetter south. A partial reversal of this flow occurred during the later Yuan dynasty and, more markedly, after the Mongols were driven out of China and the Ming dynasty



Figure 4.2 A cormorant, as depicted in the official Song pharmacopoeia, printed in 1249 (ZHBC).

was founded. The building of the northern sections of the Grand Canal, to link Dadu (Khanbalikh) with the lower Yangtze region, must have encouraged southerners to move northwards. The Ming capital was initially at Nanjing but was moved north to Beijing under the third Ming emperor, with a corresponding northward movement of population. Thus, it may well

have been during the period of the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties that fishing with cormorants began to spread around China. It must also be borne in mind that, when Marco saw southern China, it had only very recently been conquered by the Mongols. The warfare of the preceding several decades must have disrupted normal activities, at least to some extent. Marco's failure to notice fishing with cormorants is certainly an omission, but it seems reasonable to say that it is an understandable omission.

Marco also says nothing about either tea-drinking or Chinese writing. In fact, neither of these things is mentioned by most other travellers to China at about the same period. Odoric, for example, says nothing at all about them, although it might have been expected that he would at least have become aware of the drinking of tea (as Marco, associating much more with the Mongols, who seem to have preferred stronger drinks, might well not have done). It has already been suggested above that Marco overlooked certain things because he was noting what he saw on his journeys around China with the specific aim of pleasing the Great Khan with his accounts. Thus, he may well have omitted those things which he thought would be of no interest to the Khan. Odoric's failure to notice tea suggests, however, that it may simply not have seemed very remarkable to the medieval European mind to drink an infusion of leaves in boiling water. Such infusions were scarcely unknown in Europe, where tisanes continue to be popular in some regions today. Chinese writing, however, was so unlike anything known in Europe that it surely merited considerable attention. In fact, among medieval European visitors to the Far East, only William of Rubruck says anything at all about it, and his mention is very brief. He notes that the Chinese write with a brush 'and in a single character they make several letters which form one word' (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 171–2). This could scarcely have given his readers any accurate idea of what Chinese script really looked like. Perhaps others left the subject alone because it was too complex. Marco, however, was in China for long enough to have gained considerable familiarity with the system of writing, even if he never learned to read or write Chinese himself. This familiarity may in itself explain the omission. He might simply have become so familiar with it that it ceased to seem strange to him, so that he forgot that it might seem remarkable to others. This might also apply to other things that he apparently failed to notice.

There is another possible explanation. In use in China at the period were several different languages and scripts. Apart from Chinese, there was, of course, Mongolian, the language of the conquerors, written both with the Uighur script and also with the 'Phags-pa letters (see Chapter 2). It has often been suggested that Persian (written with a form of the Arabic alphabet) was used as a common language among the many foreigners working in China for the Mongols. This has been questioned by at least one authority on the Mongol period (De Rachewiltz 1983: 308n), but it must have been much spoken at least among the Khwarazmians in Yuan China. Tangut seems to have continued in use at least until well into the fourteenth century.

It is one of the languages used in the inscriptions on the Yuan period archway at Juyongguan near Beijing, which dates from 1345. It is of particular interest as the system devised for writing it was of considerable complexity and looked similar to Chinese characters. Other languages also appearing at Juyongguan are Uighur Turkish and Tibetan. This does not end the list, however, for both the Khitan and Jurchen languages had their own scripts: indeed, Khitan could be written using either of two different systems. Like Tangut, the Jurchen and Khitan scripts had similarities with Chinese characters. Jurchen script continued in use at least until the fifteenth century (Serruys 1955: 50, 57). Thus, Marco may simply have become so familiar with so many different kinds of writing that he ceased to see anything especially remarkable about Chinese script.

At this point, it is worth considering what languages and scripts Marco may actually have learned. The book claims either that he 'mastered four languages with their modes of writings' (MP/Latham: 40) or that he learned several languages and four scripts (MP/Hambis: 58; MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 27). It has generally been said that he must have known Persian, which was commonly used among the foreigners working in China at the time. It is also very probable that he learned Mongolian, for he seems to have been able to make reports to Khubilai Khan without needing an interpreter. Another very likely candidate is Uighur Turkish, also much used among the various non-Chinese officials of the Yuan empire. It may well have been more of a lingua franca than Persian (De Rachewiltz 1983: 308n). At one point in the book, Marco comments on the 'Turcomans' of Turkey, saying that they speak 'a barbarous language' (MP/Latham: 46; MP/Hambis: 69). Perhaps he is here contrasting the language of a group of 'uncivilized' nomadic Turks with the related language of the Uighurs, who had become dwellers in towns and must have developed a richer vocabulary, along with, of course, a system of writing for their language. To be able to make such a comparison, he must have had some knowledge of Turkic. Along with these languages, Marco may well have learned three scripts: Arabic, for writing Persian; the Uighur script, used for both the Uighur language and Mongolian; and the 'Phags-pa script, which had become the official way of writing Mongolian shortly before Marco arrived in China. If he learned 'several languages', this may have included some of those which, as far as is now known, were unwritten. These included the languages of the Naimans, the Merkid, the Kharlukh, the Kipchak, the Khangli and various others (De Rachewiltz 1983: 289–91). These peoples probably all spoke variants of Mongolian and Turkic, but, in China during this period, there were also quite large groups of speakers of entirely different languages, such as Alans from the Caucasus.

The question remains of what the fourth script might have been and what other language(s) Marco may have been able to speak. He was clearly interested in languages. Apart from his comment about the Turcomans, he also notes that in Yunnan the people 'speak a language of their own, which is

very difficult to understand' (MP/Latham: 177; MP/Hambis: 299). This suggests that he often made some effort to learn local languages. He also mentions dialects of Chinese and the existence of a common language and writing throughout southern China (Mangi) (MP/Latham: 239; MP/Hambis: 387). He uses words from a variety of languages, for things that he mentions for which he knew no European word. For example, there is the bird which he calls 'bargherlac' or 'bagherlac' (MP/Latham: 103; MP/Hambis: 175), which, from the description, appears to be the sandgrouse (see Chapter 9 below). This is a Turkic word. The Musk deer he says is called 'gudderi' (MP/Latham: 173; MP/Hambis: 293), which is Mongolian. Then there is the word which so puzzled most earlier commentators on Marco, 'beyamini' (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 50, 52n; MP/Hambis: 294). The animal will be identified later (see Chapter 9). The word, however, is Tibetan. The modern form is 'bamen', but it is likely, judging from one of the Chinese versions of the name, 'bai yang' (formerly pronounced 'beyang'), that there was an old, possibly dialect, pronunciation something like 'beyamen'. Marco does, therefore, show at least some familiarity with the vocabulary of several different languages.

It has usually been said that Marco could not have known any Chinese (Larner 1999: 41). The arguments for this seem to me to be extremely tenuous, based primarily on the forms of place-names that he uses and upon such things as his use of the word 'lion' for 'tiger', supposedly because he was thinking of a Persian word which means both (MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 29–30; iii, 74). Surely, however, what is relevant to the latter point is whether Marco knew a word for 'tiger' in Italian and also, given that at one point Marco actually describes a tiger, with its stripes (MP/Latham: 142; MP/Hambis: 235), whether Rustichello knew a word for 'tiger' in Italian or French. It must be presumed that they did not. Therefore, the persistent use of 'lion' for 'tiger' undoubtedly occurred simply because neither Marco nor Rustichello knew an Italian or French word for 'tiger'. It has nothing to do with Marco's knowledge of Asian languages. Tigers, of course, only occur in southern and eastern Asia and must have been virtually unknown in Europe during the thirteenth century. It should be noted that Odoric also refers to 'lions' in China (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 246). If Marco often uses Persian forms of place-names, such as 'Çardandan' for the kingdom of the 'Gold Teeth' (in Chinese, Jin Chi), then this is because such names were in common usage among the foreigners in China at the time. Other visitors to China at about the same period also use such names. Odoric, for example, uses 'Zaiton' for Quanzhou, as does Ibn Battuta. Both also use (in some form) the name 'Khanbalikh', which is derived from Turkic. As far as I am aware, there is no reason at all to think that either Odoric or Ibn Battuta spoke any Turkic language. They both also refer to Guangzhou by its Arabic name, Sin Kalan. Clearly, Ibn Battuta had good reason to do so, but why should Odoric use this name, if it were not in general use in China at the time?

Apart from the fact that he was clearly following established usage, there is another possible reason why the form of place-names used by Marco

appear often to be derived from Persian versions of the names. When he and Rustichello came to work on the writing of the book, they were faced with the same problem that besets all those who write about China: how to transliterate into the Roman alphabet words of Chinese origin. Today, there are established systems for transliterating Chinese, but in the thirteenth century there was none. Rustichello must often have found it very hard indeed to decide how to write down a Chinese name given to him by Marco. It can easily be imagined that, offered a choice between trying to transcribe 'Quanzhou' (in the Wade-Giles system, 'Ch'üan-chou') or 'Zaiton', Rustichello opted for the latter. In view of the common use of Persian in China at the time, there must, in fact, have been some kind of more or less standard system for writing Chinese names in Persian. It would have been much easier to transliterate these Persian versions of the names than to work directly from the Chinese originals. This is sufficient explanation for any apparent tendency on Marco's part to use Persian forms of Chinese names.

In fact, however, there is little reason to suppose that many of the names he uses have any connection with Persian. Most of them could just as easily have been transliterated directly from the original Chinese. For example, 'Yangui' (i.e. 'Yangiu') is a very reasonable attempt (assuming an Italian pronunciation) to transliterate the name that in the Pinyin system is written 'Yangzhou'. Marco's 'Quinsai' or 'Kinsai' might also have come directly from Chinese 'Xingzai'. It is certainly closer to this than Ibn Battuta's 'Khansa' or 'al-Khansa' (Ibn Battuta 1982: 332; Mackintosh-Smith, T. (ed.) 2002: 268). Likewise, if allowance is made for the corruptions of copyists (to whom, of course, all these place-names meant absolutely nothing), the great majority of places mentioned in the book are quite easy to identify, for someone working almost exclusively with Chinese sources (this will be shown in Chapters 6 to 8 below). It is a fact worthy of comment that Marco's transcriptions of place-names, however garbled by copyists, seem to derive from standard Chinese pronunciations, not from dialect forms. The only possible exception to this is that he sometimes seems to interchange 'n' and 'l', a very common dialect confusion. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the pronunciation of Chinese has changed since Marco's time. For example, the final consonants that he records in Tenduc (Tiande) and Succiu (Suzhou) used to exist and must still have been pronounced in the thirteenth century. Marco's consistent use of standard Chinese pronunciation argues strongly for him having at least some knowledge of the language. Many later travellers in China, even those who learned some Chinese, made a terrible mess of transcribing place-names, which are often very difficult to identify now. I have worked with twentieth-century accounts of the travels of botanists and plant-hunters in China, such as Handel-Mazzetti and Farrer (Farrer 1921: passim; Handel-Mazzetti 1996: passim). The place-names they record can often only be firmly identified if they give sufficient information about the location of the place.

Another indication that Marco had at least an imperfect knowledge of the Chinese language is his story of the 'Golden King' or 'Roi d'Or' (MP/Latham: 165–7; MP/Hambis: 279–84). This is very garbled and confused. Its exact origins will be discussed below in Chapter 7, but here it must be noted that Marco took the story to refer to a ruler of the Jin ('Gold') dynasty of the Jurchen. In fact, however, what he was told was a much more ancient tale about a completely different kingdom that was also called 'Jin' (though written differently in Chinese and not meaning 'Gold'). Confusion of this kind could really only have occurred if he had heard the story in Chinese, unless he had a very bad interpreter who created the muddle. It seems improbable, however, that, if he was on official business of the Khan and needed an interpreter, a reasonably good one would not have been supplied. Chinese, then, is likely to have been among the languages that Marco learned to speak and understand, even if not very well. Whether he ever learned to read and write Chinese is entirely another question. There seems to be nothing to suggest that he did. Perhaps he may have learned Tibetan, with its script, but again, the only evidence for this is his knowledge of an occasional Tibetan word. Marco was in the Tangut region for a long time: for about a year, according to the book (MP/Latham: 92; MP/Hambis: 153). Perhaps he learned the Tangut language. If he also learned the Tangut script, this might explain why Chinese writing was not remarkable to him. Tangut writing was based on (or imitative of) Chinese script. However, Tangut was written with some 6,600 characters and would have taken considerable time and effort to learn. The language seems to have been of some importance in the realms of the Great Khan, however, as its use in the Juyongguan inscription would suggest. It is not impossible that Marco may have found it useful to learn Tangut and its system of writing. If he did, then Chinese script would certainly not have seemed very special to him.

If Marco's description of the Far East is compared with the accounts left by other travellers at about the same period, then, despite any apparent omissions and a number of definite errors, it is clearly the fullest, most detailed and most accurate. In the past, commentators have had trouble identifying all the places that Marco mentions, but this seems largely to have been due to the inadequacy of their researches. If this was not the case with the accounts of other medieval travellers, then this was because no one but Marco gives more than a very limited number of place-names in China. Odoric manages only about a dozen, Ibn Battuta hardly as many. Marco is accused by his detractors of failing to say anything about various supposedly extremely important features of China. They point out that Odoric mentions footbinding and fishing with cormorants, but that Marco does not. Yet there is a very much longer list of things that Marco includes in his account while Odoric overlooks them. One of these is porcelain. Marco's account of it is not entirely accurate, but is reasonably close to reality (MP/Latham: 238; MP/Hambis: 386–7). By comparison, Ibn Battuta falls into total confusion. He seems to have believed that porcelain was made from

the ashes of coal and describes what is clearly the burning of limestone to make quicklime for mortar as part of the process of porcelain manufacture (Ibn Battuta 1982: 314; Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: 261). Perhaps he was misled by the use of kilns in both processes into thinking that they were one and the same. Marco's notice of porcelain is a very early one in European terms. Only a very few porcelain vessels reached Europe before 1300, almost certainly via the Arab world (Wood 1995: 65). The word 'porcelain' did not come into use in the English language until about 1550. Marco and Rustichello must often have had some difficulty in finding adequate Franco-Italian vocabulary to describe Chinese products such as this. The word 'porcelain' had several uses in medieval Europe, covering cowrie shells, items made of mother-of-pearl and the plant, purslane, as well as Chinese pottery (Wood 1995: 54). After Europeans made direct contact with China by sea, porcelain quickly became one of the major exports from China to Europe. The secret of its manufacture was not discovered by Europeans until the eighteenth century, so that it remained something uniquely Chinese until then. Its importance can be judged by the fact that it became known as 'china', the archetypal product of the country. Marco's description of porcelain as having an 'azure tint' is not inaccurate, for white porcelain with a hint of bluish coloration was commonly made during the Song dynasty (Dawson (ed.) 1964: 192). It must have continued to be manufactured immediately after the fall of Southern Song to the Mongols, when Marco saw south China.

Something else which Marco mentions but that Odoric does not is coal. It seems that this must have been more or less unknown in Italy at the time, for Marco and Rustichello treat it as a complete novelty. Marco's description of it is absolutely accurate. He remarks that it greatly reduced the need for firewood, which would not have been sufficient to meet demand if coal had not been available as replacement (MP/Latham: 156; MP/Hambis: 259–60). It was in fact the case that severe deforestation occurred in the areas around both the Northern Song capital at Kaifeng and subsequently the Southern Song capital at Hangzhou. Kaifeng became completely reliant on coal (Shiba 1970: 95). Ibn Battuta also describes the use of coal in China, but he says that it has the consistency and colour of clay and is transported on elephants! He also repeats his totally erroneous conception that porcelain was made from it (Ibn Battuta 1982: 318).

Immediately following his account of coal, Marco describes the system of what is usually called 'Ever-Normal Granaries' (Chang Ping Cang), which was intended to prevent famine (MP/Latham: 157; MP/Hambis: 260–1). He does not appear to have been aware that this was a long-established Chinese institution, dating back to a century BCE (Needham 1954: 107), but his description of how it functioned is accurate. The idea was simple enough: for the government to buy grain in years of good harvest, when prices were low, and put it into storage, so that it could then be sold at moderate price during years when crops were poor. Unfortunately, the system did not always

work as it should have done, but it was repeatedly reintroduced at various periods of Chinese history. Under the Mongols, it was first put into effect in 1269, shortly before Marco arrived in China (YS: zhi 45(1), 1649). Long after Marco's time, this Chinese concept contributed to the establishment of a similar system in the USA under President F. D. Roosevelt (Dawson (ed.) 1964: 337). It does not seem, however, to have caught the attention of any other medieval visitor to China.

Paper money was an entirely alien concept to Europeans in the thirteenth century. Marco's description of it shows that, although he had become familiar with its use, he did not understand the basis on which it was issued (MP/Latham: 147–9; MP/Hambis: 246–9). The Mongols had used some kind of paper money before the reign of Khubilai Khan, but it was only during his first year on the throne that it was systematically put into circulation. Its value was fixed against that of silk. Paper money worth one thousand ounces of silk was equivalent in value to fifty Chinese ounces of silver. The notes had a variety of face values, as Marco states. The smallest were worth ten, twenty, thirty and fifty cash (Chinese copper coins). In 1275, notes with lower values of two, three and five cash were issued, but these were soon found to be impractical and were withdrawn three years later. Notes of higher value were worth 100, 200 and 500 cash and one and two strings of cash (YS: zhi 42, 1586–7). Chinese coins had a hole in the middle and could be strung together. A full string comprised, at least nominally, one thousand cash (Gernet 1962: 78–9). The question of what the notes were printed on will be dealt with later (see Chapter 9). Notes were at first printed using wooden blocks, but from 1276 copper blocks were used instead. There was a problem of inflation, no doubt due to over-issue of paper money. In 1287, a new issue of notes was made, intended to exchange against the old notes (which continued in circulation) at the rate of one to five. Thus, a new note with a face value of one string of cash was worth old notes for five strings. Marco states, again quite correctly, that forging this paper money was a capital offence and also that old, worn notes could be exchanged for new ones at a discount of three per cent. Offices for the exchange of worn notes for new were set up in 1265. The discount was reduced to 2 per cent from 1266 until 1285 and then restored to the original rate (YS: zhi 42, 1587). Surviving notes of the Yuan dynasty are as Marco describes them, printed on paper and with vermilion seals impressed upon them (Anon. 1983: 51).

Another very interesting section of the book is Marco's description of what he calls 'salamander', by which he clearly meant asbestos. He debunks the common medieval belief that it was the hair of an animal and describes how it was mined, cleaned, spun and woven, and how cloths made from it can be cleaned by putting them into fire for a time (MP/Latham: 89–90; MP/Hambis: 149–51). Although stories were also current in China about such cloth being made from the hair of the 'fire-rat', its true origin had been known there since at least as early as the fifth or sixth century. Writers of the Song dynasty were quite clear that it was not of animal origin (Needham

1959: 655–62). Marco was, however, the first European since the second century to give a true account of asbestos. Again, no other medieval visitor to China seems to have recorded anything at all on the subject (Olschki 1960: 167–8).

Marco's rejection of the salamander legend is entirely typical. Although his book was quite often described as being about 'the marvels of the world' (a description not discouraged by Rustichello, who refers to great wonders or marvels at the beginning of the book), Marco several times quite deliberately exposes the falsity of supposedly 'marvellous' fables. Besides the salamander legend, he is also dismissive of faked 'pygmies' from Sumatra, the supposed nature of the unicorn (identified with the rhinoceros) and the vast power and splendour of Prester John. He omits all mention of the various 'monstrous races' of European legend, who were believed to inhabit eastern Asia (Larner 1999: 82). All this is in very strong contrast with the stories of other travellers. Odoric tells his readers that the Yangtze River flows through the land of pygmies only three spans high, that certain idols, when thrown into a fire, jump out again, though they can be prevented from doing so by sprinkling the fire with holy water, and that, in 'a certain valley', he heard the sound of citterns playing music all by themselves (Komroff 1928: 241, 252–3). John of Plano Carpini is scarcely any better. He talks of 'wild men, who do not speak at all and have no joints in their legs', so that if they fall 'they cannot get up again without the help of others' (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 20). Then there are the monsters who looked like women but whose menfolk were dogs and used ice as armour; the people who lived underground because the sun made such a terrible noise; the Parossites whose mouths and stomachs were so small that they could eat nothing, but lived on the steam from cooked meat; monsters with feet like the hooves of oxen and the faces of dogs and others with only one arm and one foot, who fired one bow between two of them (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 23–5, 30–1). All this is related with absolutely no expression of doubt.

William of Rubruck has been much admired for the, in many ways, excellent account which he left of his journey to Karakorum and what he saw and experienced there (Larner 1999: 24–5). He is much less prone to recounting fables than John of Plano Carpini, but nevertheless gives an account of 'Chinchins', creatures that look like humans except that they cannot bend their knees and are hairy all over. They are only a cubit high and are made drunk by hunters who then take a little of their blood, which is an excellent dye for cloth (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 171). Then there are the people called Muc, who, William tells us, have towns but do not need to domesticate animals because the local wild creatures are so tame. Strangers in their country have to be shut up indoors, lest the animals smell them and become wild (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 143). He is also very contemptuous of 'the sorceries of the pagans' in their attempts to cure illness, but shows great faith in the power of holy water to drive out demons (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 167–8). William is purely a man of his time, sharing the beliefs and prejudices

of his European contemporaries, which, though they often seem ridiculous today, were entirely normal then.

Ibn Battuta's account of China is perhaps the worst of all from this period. It is riddled with errors: not only did he believe that porcelain was made from coal, but he also confused the Yellow River with the Grand Canal and other waterways, to create an imaginary river which flowed from near Khanbalikh all the way to Guangzhou. Outside the latter city, he found a venerable sage over two hundred years old, who never ate or drank anything and performed miracles (Ibn Battuta 1982: 313, 327–9; Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: 261, 265–7). Parts of his account are so bad that most commentators have doubted whether he ever actually visited Khanbalikh, as he claimed to have done (Ibn Battuta 1982: 48–9, 325n; Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: 323n). In his defence, it seems highly likely that his entire account of his travels was dictated from memory, some years after the event, so that absolute accuracy could hardly be expected (Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: viii–ix). There is, however, another reason for the inadequacy of his account of China. He was very much an outsider there and disliked a great deal of what he saw. He was clearly disgusted, for example, by the fact that the Chinese ate pigs and dogs. He even says that he finally 'tended to stay at home as much as possible' (Ibn Battuta 1982: 315–16, 332; Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: 262, 268). It was his attitude that was the fundamental barrier to achieving any real insight into Chinese civilization and culture.

In contrast, Marco obviously became very much at home in China, even if only as part of a foreign community closely associated with the conquering Mongols. He is full of admiration for Khubilai Khan, 'the greatest lord the world has ever known' (MP/Latham: 113; MP/Hambis: 195). His account of China, where he spent most of his long period away from his native Venice, persistently emphasizes the wealth and plenty of the country. It contains some exaggeration and a few errors, but is remarkably free from irrational marvels. This is not to say that there are none in his account. It is noticeable, however, that those that do appear are mainly in the first section of the book, concerning his outward journey to China. At this time, he was not only very young but must also have still retained a European, Christian outlook to a much greater degree than later. Thus, most of the Christian miracles related in the book are found in this section. They include the stories of the fish that appeared only at Lent, the shoemaker whose faith moved a mountain, the stone given to the Magi and the unsupported pillar in the church at Samarkand (Larner 1999: 80–1; MP/Latham: 49–50, 54–7, 59, 81–2). In many cases, Marco makes it clear that he is relating what he had heard locally rather than what he had personally observed. There is an important distinction to be noted here. It is frequently very obvious that, when Marco tells of what he has seen with his own eyes, then he is accurate, but when he relates what he has heard from others, his account is full of errors.

5 Cities, canals and rivers

Marco Polo was in China at exactly the time when the Mongols were completing their conquests there. He arrived at the court of the Great Khan a year or two before the fall of Hangzhou in 1276 and well before the final destruction of the Song dynasty in 1279. Campaigns were also continuing in Yunnan, South-east Asia and Korea. Great changes took place in China during this period. It is very much in favour of Marco's veracity that his description of the Yuan empire shows his knowledge of these changes. If he had been relying on second-hand information, especially if that information had been gathered outside China, then it is extremely unlikely that he could have avoided anachronisms. He correctly describes cities that had not existed before the 1250s and 1260s, as well as canals that were dug at precisely the time that he was in the empire of Khubilai Khan. It might be thought that rivers were constant geographical features, but in fact they can change their courses. Again, Marco locates them as they were at the period. Since other near-contemporary visitors to the Far East generally seem to have had a very poor understanding of the geography of China, Marco's account is particularly impressive in this respect.

According to the Prologue of the book, when Marco first arrived in China, with his father and uncle, he was received by the Great Khan in a city called 'Clemeinfu' (usually corrected to 'Chemeinfu' or 'Kemenfu') (MP/Latham: 39; MP/Hambis: 56). This was Kaipingfu. It was a new city, built for Khubilai before he became Great Khan, in the pasture-lands of what is today Inner Mongolia. Kaipingfu was its original name, but later it was also called Shangdu and was used by Khubilai as his summer capital. In 1255, during the reign of his elder brother Möngke Khan, Khubilai was allotted land in the area so that he could build a town there. Möngke and Khubilai seem to have been on good terms, Möngke trusting the conquest of Yunnan to his brother and conducting operations against the Song empire jointly with him. It seems that Möngke wanted Khubilai to create a base south of the Gobi Desert, from where it would be easier to exercise control over China than it was from Karakorum. In 1256, Khubilai ordered Liu Bingzhong to select a site east of the old Jin town of Huanzhou, on the north side of the Luan River, for the construction of the new city. It was completed by 1259

and was then called Kaipingfu. It was in this city that Khubilai was proclaimed Great Khan on 5 May 1260. It officially became his capital in 1264 and was then also called Shangdu. After the completion of the new imperial city of Dadu, it was used as summer capital. It grew to have a population of about 120 thousand (YS: zhi 10, 888; liezhuan 44, 2303; De Rachewiltz 1983: 288).

Marco gives a description of Shangdu, correctly saying that it was built by 'the Great Khan now reigning' (MP/Latham: 108; MP/Hambis: 183–5). What he says of the city seems to accord well with the facts, as far as they are known. Investigation of the existing remains of the city have shown that it was divided into three walled sections. The wall around the palace area was faced with brick, with towers at each corner, and enclosed a series of palaces and pavilions. Outside the palace area was the imperial city, surrounded by a wall faced with stone, within which were government buildings. The outer wall, made of earth, extended from the northern and western sides of the imperial city, enclosing the park described by Marco. The exterior walls were some 2.2 kilometres (1.4 miles) long on each side. Outside them, on every side except the north, were dwellings, shops and warehouses (Guojia Wenwu Shiye Guanliju (ed.) 1981: 211–12). Marco's figure of 'sixteen miles' enclosed by the walls seems too much, but if it is assumed that by 'miles' he here meant the Chinese measure, li, then he would be very close to being correct. The li is now officially half a kilometre, though formerly it varied somewhat in length, quite often from place to place as well as from time to time. Chinese measures of length were, however, almost invariably shorter in the past (Needham 1959: 82). The walls of Shangdu would have been more than four li on each side, perhaps more or less five li. They would therefore have enclosed a total area of about 20 to 25 square li. Deducting from this the area of the imperial city, about one quarter of the total area, gives a figure very close to Marco's sixteen. It is highly unlikely that he made any precise measurements, so this is not an unreasonable estimate. Marco's description here of how bamboo can be split and used for roofing is also accurate. It is interesting that he gives details of the palaces and the imperial park at Shangdu. This suggests that he had personally entered the palace area and the park, supporting his claim to have enjoyed Khubilai's favour. Unfortunately, Shangdu was abandoned during the early 1400s and fell into ruin, so that it is impossible to be sure of exactly how accurate these details are. There is nothing in them that seems at all improbable, however.

Liu Bingzhong was also charged with overseeing the construction of the Great Khan's other new capital, the city of Dadu (Khanbalikh), close to the old Jin capital of Zhongdu. When it had fallen to the Mongols in 1215, Zhongdu had been partially destroyed. The Jin imperial palace area had suffered most, being thoroughly looted and burned, but the whole city had been damaged. There had been no intention at the time to use Zhongdu as a capital, so no care was taken to preserve it. In fact, for some time after the

fall of the city, the Mongols continued to maltreat its inhabitants and steal property. It is reported that, in the immediate aftermath of the conquest, there was starvation, so that people were reduced to cannibalism to survive. Intervention by Yelü Chucai, who had been in Zhongdu when it fell and was taken into the service of Chinggis Khan, improved the situation. Nevertheless, Zhongdu remained semi-ruinous. When Liu Bingzhong surveyed the area in 1266 in preparation for the construction of the new capital city, he decided to leave the old city as it was and build a new one close beside it, to the north-east. Work began in 1267 and continued for more than a decade. The palace area was more or less completed by early 1274 and Khubilai celebrated with a reception there for the princes, nobility and high officials of his empire. When Marco arrived in China, therefore, Dadu had come into use only about a year previously. Major building work continued until 1276 and it was only after that year that the city was fully occupied. Some construction continued into the 1280s (YS: liezhuan 44, 2303; Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 306–10; Beijing Shi Shehui Kexue Yuan (ed.) 1991: i, 90–1).

This new capital city of the Yuan dynasty stood exactly on the site of modern Beijing. Although considerable alterations were made early in the Ming dynasty and very few buildings of Yuan date now survive, the basic layout of the centre of Beijing is still more or less as it was under the Mongols. The existing Forbidden City occupies the site of Khubilai's palaces. Remains of the walls and moat of the Yuan city are still visible. It was, indeed, Khubilai Khan who first made Beijing, as it was later called, the capital of all China. Marco's description of the city is an important early record, but there are also Chinese sources with which it can be compared. Outside the city of Zhongdu, to the north-east, there had been a Jin imperial palace beside a lake. It was in this area that the Yuan palaces were built. Marco says that Khubilai decided to build a complete new city because he had been warned by his astrologers that the old city would rebel against him. It is undoubtedly true that, after the rebellion of Li Tan in 1262, Khubilai distrusted his Chinese subjects. In fact, however, it is more likely that the choice of site for the new city was affected more by the availability of water than any other consideration (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 310). The old Jin city of Zhongdu had drawn its water from the springs supplying the Lian Hua Chi or Lotus Flower Pool (still in existence today near the new Beijing West railway station). This source of water had become inadequate. Since the new city was planned to be larger than the old, a better supply had to be found. Considerable work was undertaken to increase the flow of water from springs in the hills west of the city to its centre, where the existing lake was enlarged and a new one was dug to its north-west. Marco correctly says that the earth dug from the lakes was used to create the hill that he calls the 'Green Mound' (MP/Latham: 127; MP/Hambis: 216). Enlarged further under the Ming, it is today known as Jing Shan or Prospect Hill (sometimes called 'Coal Hill').

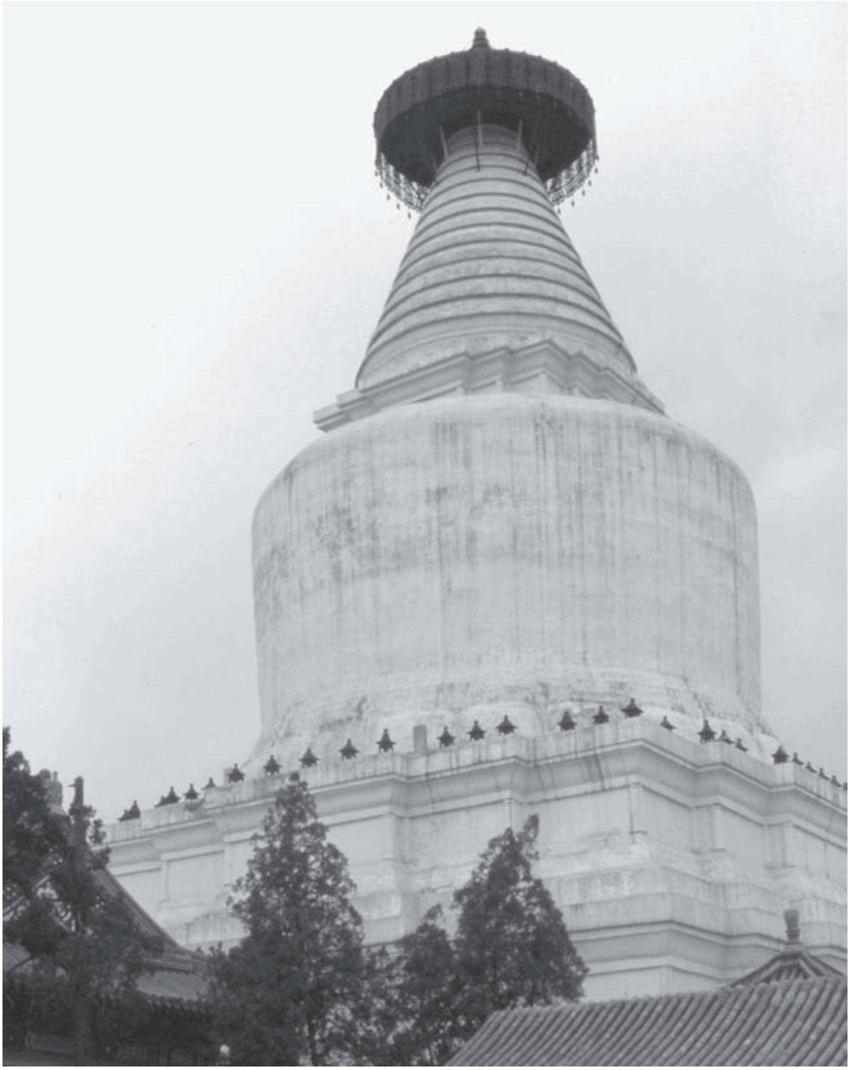


Figure 5.1 The White Dagoba of the Miaoying Buddhist Temple, one of very few surviving buildings in Beijing that date from the period of the Yuan dynasty. Erected in 1271, during the reign of Khubilai Khan, it was new when Marco first arrived in Dadu.

Marco's description of the Yuan city is generally accurate. He says that there were twelve gates in the city walls, although in fact there were only eleven (on the north side there were only two), but otherwise there is little to fault. The outer walls of the city measured 28,600 metres (31,260 yards) all round (Hou Renzhi and Deng Hui 2001: 78). From north to south they

were very slightly longer than from east to west, though this would scarcely have been noticeable. It was often said that they were 60 li in total length, which must have been at least very close to correct at the time, the li then being shorter than now. Marco's 'total circumference of twenty-four miles' (MP/Latham: 128; MP/Hambis: 218) is therefore not correct in terms of li. In fact, the total length of the walls was just under 18 English miles. Again, it must be assumed that he never actually measured them, so that the figure is merely a rough estimation. He is absolutely right in describing the palaces of the Great Khan and of his son standing on either side of a lake, which at this period was the Tai Ye Chi. The Jiang Fu Gong palace was occupied by the Crown Prince Jingim (or Chinkim, written 'Zhenjin' in Chinese), until his early death in 1285 (Beijing Shi Shehui Kexue Yuan (ed.) 1991: ii, 177; Olschki 1960: 412n). It then continued to be occupied by his widow and her son, Temür, who succeeded Khubilai in 1294. It should be noted that Marco knew of the death of Jingim (whom he calls 'Chinghiz') and that his son, Temür, was 'destined to be Khan' (MP/Latham: 124, 127; MP/Hambis: 212, 217). Here again, he shows that he has accurate and up-to-date information. The other lake which Marco mentions (in at least some versions of the book), situated to the north-west of the palaces, was the Ji Shui Tan. Marco is again right in describing water flowing first into this lake and then into the lake between the two palaces (MP/Latham: 126–7; MP/Marsden: 170). These lakes were altered during the early 1400s, when the city was reconstructed as capital of the Yongle Emperor of the Ming dynasty (Hou Renzhi and Deng Hui 2001: 93–9). The Ji Shui Tan was reduced in size and split into three sections, today's Xi Hai, Hou Hai and Qian Hai. The Tai Ye Chi was also split, to form today's Bei Hai and Zhong Hai, while a new lake, the Nan Hai, was added to the south. Marco is also correct in his description of the Bell Tower. This was a very prominent building, as it stood at the intersection of particularly broad streets running north–south and east–west. About 100 metres (110 yards) south of it, near the bank of the Ji Shui Tan, stood the Drum Tower, just east of which was the actual centre of the city, marked by the Zhongxin Tai, or Central Terrace (Beijing Shi Shehui Kexue Yuan (ed.) 1991: ii, 174). The existing Drum and Bell Towers in Beijing stand on the same sites as the Yuan buildings. Both were completely rebuilt in 1420. The Bell Tower was then destroyed by fire and again rebuilt in 1745 (Beijing Shi Shehui Kexue Yuan (ed.) 1991: ii, 196–7). The curfew which Marco mentions was enforced in much the way that he describes (MP/Latham: 130; MP/Hambis: 218–19). The bell was indeed rung three times and exceptions to the curfew were allowed for urgent official business, illness, death and childbirth. The usual punishment for infringements was 27 strokes of the light bamboo cane (YS: zhi 53, 1801). The night was divided into periods of approximately two hours (called 'geng'). When the bell finished sounding at the beginning of the first period, the curfew began. It lasted about eight hours until the bell began to ring at the start of the fifth period. Probably this was from about 10.00 pm until 6.00 am. It may be noted here also that

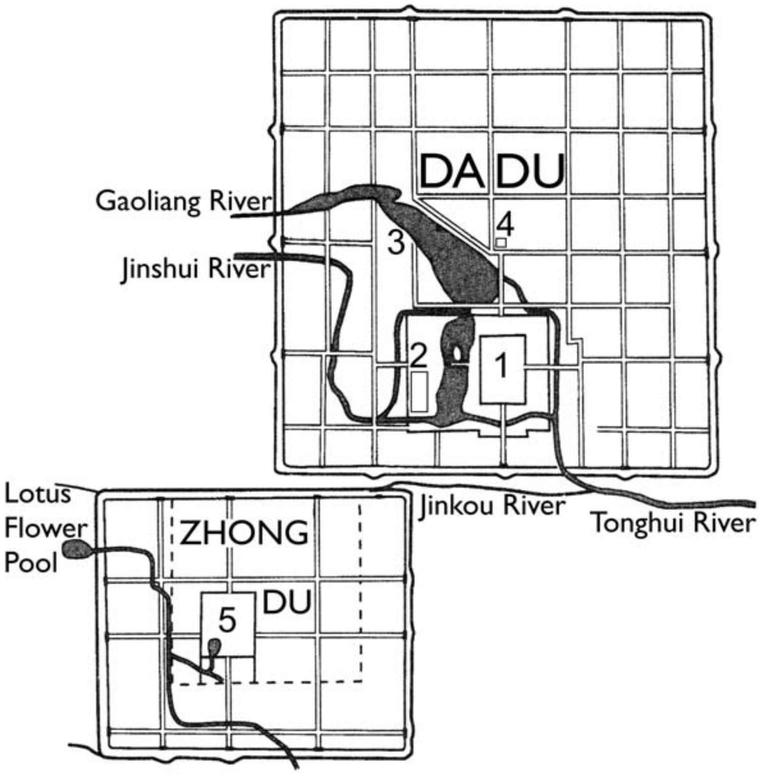


Figure 5.2 Plan of Yuan Dadu and Jin Zhongdu. The broken line within the area of Zhongdu indicates the position of the Liao city of Yanjing.
Key: 1 Palaces of the Great Khan; 2 Jiang Fu Gong; 3 Ji Shui Tan; 4 Zhongxin Tai; 5 Jin Imperial Palaces.

Marco was quite right regarding the number of strokes of the cane which he says were inflicted as punishment (MP/Latham: 101; MP/Hambis: 171–2). They were always a multiple of ten, plus seven, up to 107 (YS: zhi 50, 1744).

The building of the new capital city of Dadu led also to another major construction project, one that ranks with the Great Wall in its scale. It is strange that it has never caught the imagination in the way that the Great Wall has, perhaps because it has a much more obvious practical application. It is also odd that previous commentators on Marco seem often to have overlooked the full significance of his descriptions of this impressive achievement, the Grand Canal. It was built at exactly the time that he claimed to be in China. Indeed, the final section of it, from Tongzhou to the Ji Shui Tan in the heart of Dadu, was only completed in 1293, shortly after his departure. If Marco had not actually been in China at the period, it seems very unlikely that he could have obtained such accurate information about this great

waterway. Again, it may be noted that no other near-contemporary traveller has left any mention of the Canal that bears comparison with Marco's account. Ibn Battuta's highly confused notions regarding Chinese waterways have already been mentioned. Odoric, although he seems to have travelled on the Canal, apparently thought that it was a river (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 242).

It was often the case during Chinese history that the capital city could only be adequately provisioned by bringing supplies to it from a considerable distance. Capitals attracted a very large population, among whom were, of course, a considerable number of government officials with their families and servants. There was usually also a large number of military personnel, plus shopkeepers, traders and many people engaged in service industries. These city-dwellers needed to eat, but they did not produce any food. On the contrary, the rich among them often removed land near the city from agricultural production by building large mansions and gardens. In the absence of modern means of transport, carrying adequate quantities of supplies into the city frequently presented great problems. Vast amounts of grain were consumed by the city's inhabitants. Transporting a sufficient quantity of heavy, bulky sacks of grain on carts was very difficult. Water transportation was, at the period, by far the best solution to the supply problem.

North China is not well served by natural waterways. The great river of the region is the Yellow River, but it is not good for navigation. It carries very large amounts of silt, which is, indeed, what makes it 'Yellow'. This is constantly being deposited in its lower reaches, where it forms shifting shoals that cause great difficulties for boats. Its volume of flow varies greatly during the year because of the extremely seasonal nature of the rainfall in the region. Much of north China receives about 80 per cent of its annual rainfall during two or three months in summer. During dry periods, the river may become very shallow. In winter, it may freeze. For all these reasons, the Yellow River has rarely been much used for navigation, except by very small boats. A few other northern rivers have been of more use, especially the Hai He, which flows through modern Tianjin, but, in general, water transport has never been very much developed on the river systems of the north. In any case, the requirement has usually been for north–south communication, and all the major rivers of China flow roughly from west to east. Thus, in northern China waterborne traffic has usually required the digging of canals. Various canal systems existed in north China before the Yuan dynasty, but these had been neglected for centuries. During the period when the Jin dynasty controlled the north, with the Song empire to the south, north–south communications fell into total disrepair. In any case, since there had never been a capital of all China at Dadu before, there had never been the need to link it to the south by canal.

The principal requirement was for communication between the lower Yangtze region and the capital city. In early times, north China had been

the centre of Chinese civilization and the Yangtze valley had been poorly developed and backward. This situation had changed greatly over the centuries. As early as about the year 200, south China had already become a major economic region. During the Sui and Tang dynasties (late sixth to early tenth centuries), grain was regularly shipped by river and canal from the lower Yangtze region to supply the capital, then either at Xi'an or Luoyang. The difficulties involved in carrying grain as far inland as Xi'an were among the main reasons for the frequent use of Luoyang as capital under the Tang. By the period of the Song dynasty, the Yangtze valley was the greatest grain-producing region of China. Rice, which yields heavier crops than other grains, flourishes in the warm, wet conditions there. It was sometimes possible to reap two harvests per year. It was said that, if there was a good crop in the area around Suzhou and Huzhou (near the Tai Hu lake), then the whole empire had enough to eat (Liao Zhihao *et al.* 1980: 48).

When Khubilai's new capital was first built, the intention seems to have been to supply it with grain from the south principally using coastal navigation. One reason for the decision to locate the capital at Dadu may in fact have been that it was possible to navigate inland from the coast using the Hai He and its major tributaries the Sanggan (now the Yongding) and the Lu or Bai Rivers, to bring grain up to the vicinity of the city. There had been great progress in ship-building in China during the few centuries immediately preceding the Mongol conquest. During the Tang dynasty, the trade from the Indian Ocean to ports on the south-east coast of China had mainly been carried in Arabian ships. By the period of the Song dynasty, this had changed. Chinese ships sailed regularly to South-east Asia, southern India and even as far as the Persian Gulf and the east coast of Africa (Shiba 1983: 104–6). When Hangzhou fell to the Mongols in 1276, the treasures of the Song imperial court were shipped north to Dadu by sea (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 346). The voyages could be hazardous, however. Sailing from the Yangtze estuary to the Hai He involved rounding the eastern end of the Shandong peninsula and crossing the Gulf of Bohai, notoriously shallow and littered with shoals. There was also the risk of encountering bad weather, particularly during the typhoon season in summer. In 1286, a quarter of the grain shipped from the south by the sea route was lost in storms (Dawson 1972: 200). This did not prevent the quantity of grain carried by sea from continuing to rise during Khubilai's reign, from 46,050 piculs (shi: about 60 kg) in 1283 to 1,595,000 in 1290 (Cao Zixi (ed.) 1990: 346). An attempt was made to shorten the sea route by digging a canal across the Shandong peninsula, linking the Gu or Dagu River, which flows into the Jiaozhou Bay (near modern Qingdao), with the Jiao or Jiaolai River, which flows northwards to the Gulf of Bohai. This route was put into use for a short period, but in the long run the project proved impractical and was eventually abandoned (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 104–7).

The southern sections of the old canal network that had been used for carrying grain to Xi'an, Luoyang and Kaifeng during the Sui, Tang and



Figure 5.3 The Grand Canal at Wuxi, between Changzhou and Suzhou. Still a heavily used waterway today, this part of the Canal was first dug in AD 610, during the Sui dynasty.

Northern Song dynasties were still in good repair. The canal from Hangzhou to the Yangtze River had been dug during the Sui dynasty, in about 610, and was important for local traffic as well as for long-distance transport. It remains in use to this day. The canals between the Yangtze and the Huai Rivers seem also to have been in reasonable condition, although they had undoubtedly suffered from neglect during the period when the Jin dynasty controlled northern China. At that time, the Huai region was a borderland and not infrequently the scene of warfare. It was north of the Huai that most work was needed, for here there had been no major navigable canals for centuries. The most pressing problem was that of water transport in the immediate vicinity of Dadu, for whether grain was carried north by sea or by inland waterways, the final stage of the journey to the city was necessarily by river or canal. The Hai He and its tributary the Lu or Bai River allowed navigation as far as Tongzhou, but this was some distance outside the walls of Dadu (though it has now become more or less part of the conurbation of Beijing). Similarly, the Sanggan River flowed south-west of the old city of Zhongdu. The Jinkou River, which flowed between the old and new cities, was partly a man-made river, but it was not adequate for navigation. The major problem with the Jinkou River was that it drew much of its water from the Sanggan, which was subject to violent fluctuations in flow. When the Sanggan was in spate, it carried a great deal of silt. This tended to block

the channel of the Jinkou River and cause flooding. The problem became so bad after a couple of decades that in 1298 the Jinkou River was deliberately blocked, to prevent water from the Sanggan flowing along it and flooding Dadu (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 85). A reasonably good solution to the problem was found in 1279, when the Ba River was opened up from just north of Tongzhou to the eastern side of Dadu (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 85–6). It was then possible to bring boats from Tongzhou to the vicinity of the Chong Ren Gate (renamed the Dong Zhi Gate early in the Ming dynasty) (Beijing Shi Shehui Kexue Yuan (ed.) 1991: ii, 172). Grain shipped by this route was stored in warehouses near the Gate, the central gate of the three in the eastern wall of the city.

Apart from the rivers flowing into the Hai He from the north-west, the direction in which Dadu lay, there were others which came from a more southerly direction. The most important of these for navigation was the Wei He. This flowed more or less from the south-south-west to join the Hai He where the city of Tianjin now stands. It could be navigated upstream as far south as the area of the border between modern Hebei and Shandong provinces. This meant that, if a waterway could be opened up across Shandong, then the Wei could be linked with the Huai and the existing canals to the south. This would create a complete waterway all the way from Hangzhou to Dadu. The work required was considerable, but the decision to undertake it was made shortly after the surrender of Hangzhou to the Mongol general Bayan in 1276. Bayan had apparently been very impressed with the canal system around Hangzhou and suggested extending it northward. Khubilai agreed (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 103–4). It took some time to survey a route and work did not begin until early in 1283. The first section was completed later the same year. Known as the Jizhou River, this used the channel of the Si River, a tributary of the Huai, to a short distance south of modern Jining in Shandong. Water from both the Si and the Wen Rivers, which flowed westwards from the mountains of central Shandong, were channelled to Jining, where they were divided, partly flowing southwards to join the Si again and thus to the Huai, and partly flowing northwards to join the Daqing River (now roughly the channel of the Yellow River in Shandong). It was then possible to navigate the Daqing downstream to the Gulf of Bohai and coast the short distance to the mouth of the Hai He. Alternatively, goods could be unloaded on the north bank of the Daqing River and carried overland a fairly short distance to the Wei. There were problems with both these routes, however. The mouth of the Daqing River tended to become partly blocked by silt, making it impossible for boats to enter the sea without running aground. The overland route crossed a low-lying area which often became wet and more or less impassable for heavily laden carts during summer and autumn. It was therefore soon decided to cut a further channel, linking the Jizhou River with the Wei. The order to undertake this project was issued in 1287. Work on this canal, called the Huitong River, began early the next year and was completed in about six months (Yao



Figure 5.4 A peasant boat, as depicted in the agricultural treatise written by Wang Zhen in about 1313 (WZNS). The original illustrations have not survived: this picture is taken from a sixteenth-century edition of the book.

Hanyuan 1997: 104, 107). This was the final major link in the canal system, allowing inland navigation from Hangzhou all the way to Dadu. The supply of water to the Jizhou River was, however, scarcely adequate. From 1285, boats with a crew of four, capable of carrying only 100 piculs, were used on this section of the Grand Canal (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 104).

One further modification was made to the Canal during the reign of Khubilai Khan. In 1291, it was suggested that improvements could be made to the canal system near Dadu, so that boats could be brought right into the heart of the city, to the Ji Shui Tan. Work on this project began the next year and it was completed in the autumn of 1293. The new canal was called the Tonghui River and ran from Tongzhou to the southern wall of Dadu, where it turned northwards and passed through a water-gate. Skirting the

eastern wall of the Imperial City, it arrived at the southern end of the Ji Shui Tan (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 86–8). It is recorded that when Khubilai Khan returned to Dadu from Shangdu in the year that the Tonghui River was completed, he passed the Ji Shui Tan and was delighted to see it covered with boats (YS: liezhuan 51, 2415). Unfortunately, this situation did not last for very long. There were many problems with the Grand Canal, due mainly to damage caused by summer floods and lack of water during the dry season. The water supply around Beijing became inadequate for the city as it grew. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, it was rarely possible for boats to navigate beyond Tongzhou. The canals between there and the city could not be kept supplied with sufficient water. Nevertheless, the Grand Canal remained in operation for centuries, with regular maintenance and some improvements, until the early 1850s. Then disastrous flooding of the Yellow River and a major change in its course wrecked much of the Canal in Shandong. It was never restored and its northern sections largely fell into disuse.

The most important projects in the construction of the Grand Canal, the opening up of the Jizhou and Huitong Rivers, were only completed during the 1280s. Yet Marco gives good descriptions of the Grand Canal, saying that Khubilai 'has had this water-way constructed from Kwachau [Guazhou on the Yangtze River] to Khan-balik' (MP/Latham: 210; MP/Hambis: 350). He makes it clear that it is possible to travel all the way from the Yangtze to Khanbalikh by inland waterways, something that became possible only in 1288. How he could have obtained such accurate and up-to-date information without actually being on the spot is hard to imagine. Moreover, he gives a number of details relating to the Canal which are also correct. In describing Dadu, he speaks of 'cart-loads' of silk being brought into the city (MP/Latham: 130). Since he left China before the completion of the Tonghui River allowed boats to sail all the way to the Ji Shui Tan, it would indeed have been necessary for goods to be brought into Dadu by cart. He notes that, at the place called 'Lingui' or 'Linju', there were larger boats than could be used further north on the Canal (MP/Latham: 200; MP/Hambis: 333). 'Lingui' will be firmly identified below (Chapter 8). It was close to Xuzhou in the north-west of modern Jiangsu province, located on the opposite side of the Canal. It was indeed the case that, at this point, the canalized Si River joined an arm of the Yellow River, so that there was much more water available. The necessity to use small boats on the Canal north of here has already been noted above. Marco's description of the division of the river at 'Singiu Matu' or 'Sinju Matu' is also very good (MP/Latham: 199; MP/Hambis: 332). It is so good, in fact, as to allow the certain identification of 'Singiu Matu', a name which is somewhat problematic (see Chapter 8). The probable reason for the importance of 'Singiu Matu', and the very large number of boats which Marco says could be seen in the city, is that goods were transshipped there from the small boats which came up from 'Lingui' into larger boats for the onward journey towards the north.

The reference to the junction of the Si with an arm of the Yellow River requires some explanation. Throughout the book, Marco refers to the Yellow River as the 'Kara-moran', which is derived from the Mongol name of the River (meaning 'Black River'). When describing the journey along the Grand Canal towards the south, he says that the Yellow River is reached after passing 'Siju' or 'Ciugiu', somewhere near the city of Huai'an ('Hwai-ngan-chau' or 'Coigangiu') (MP/Latham: 201; MP/Hambis: 335). This is nowhere near the present course of the Yellow River. During recorded Chinese history, the River has changed its course many times in its lower reaches. The land is generally very flat in the east of north China, so that rivers can easily wander across it. The large amounts of silt carried by the Yellow River and the great seasonal fluctuations in its flow have caused it to flood very frequently. After flooding, it has often not returned to its old course. This is because there is a constant deposition of silt on the bed of the River, which gradually causes it to rise. In the attempt to control flooding, over the course of many centuries, dykes have been built along the sides of the River. The unfortunate tendency has been for the bed of the River between the dykes to rise until it is higher than the surrounding land. Thus, if the dykes have broken when the River has been in flood, it has tended to flow out from between them and find a new course over lower land. Sometimes the change in course has been very dramatic. Before 1128 the Yellow River ran nowhere near the vicinity of Huai'an. It flowed into the sea north of the Shandong peninsula. In 1128, during fighting between Song and Jin, its dykes were deliberately broken north of Kaifeng by the Song army, to block the advance of the Jin forces. It then flowed north of Juye in modern Shandong to join the Si River south of Jining. Via the course of the Si, it flowed into the Huai River and thus to the sea. This was a very dramatic change of course. From flowing into the Gulf of Bohai, north of the Shandong peninsula, the River turned southwards to join the Huai and reach the sea south of the peninsula. Immediately after 1128, it repeatedly flooded and changed its course often, as there were no adequate dykes to control it in its new bed. It continued to take a generally south-eastward direction, however, flowing into the Huai. As this region was close to the borders between the Southern Song and Jin empires, it was neglected and new dykes were not built. In 1234, the Mongols again broke the dykes north of Kaifeng, to drown a Song army. Its exact course after this is very uncertain, as records are more or less lacking. It probably split into more than one branch in its lower course. In 1286, there was major flooding of the River. After this, it is known to have flowed in three separate channels. One branch joined the Si near Xuzhou, one flowed into the Guo River and thus into the Huai and the third flowed via the Ying River to the Huai. Both these latter rivers run from modern Henan province into Anhui and join the Huai well upstream of Huai'an (Chen Binyin (ed.) 1982: 52–4). Thus, in the late 1280s and early 1290s, which seems to be the period to which Marco's description of the Grand Canal relates, only one branch of the Yellow River out of three

flowed past Xuzhou and 'Lingui'. The greater part of its waters must have run into the two upstream branches, so that it was indeed only on arrival at the main course of the Huai River near Huai'an that the main stream of the Yellow River was reached. This situation changed later, though exactly when is not clear. There was repeated flooding of the Yellow River during the 1280s and 1290s (Chen Binyin (ed.) 1982: 55). By about 1330, the main channel of the River was the most northerly one, flowing into the Si River and thus to the Huai (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 64). This may already have been the situation when Odoric of Pordenone passed through the area, during the early 1320s. He says that 'Lencyn' or 'Lenzin', undoubtedly the same as Marco's 'Lingui', stood upon the Yellow River (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 242; MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 141n). Here again, it seems that Marco correctly describes a situation that existed for only a short time.

The route of the Grand Canal between Jining and Huai'an was considerably altered during the late Ming dynasty. A new channel was opened running further to the east, to join the Yellow River near Suqian. This left Xuzhou and 'Lingui' some distance from the Canal (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 258–9). Despite the immense amount of work needed to keep the Canal in good repair and functioning properly, it continued in regular use until the Yellow River made another huge alteration in its course. This took place over a few years during the 1850s, taking some time to stabilize (Chen Binyin (ed.) 1982: 63). The new course was more or less as it is today, the River once again reaching the sea in the Gulf of Bohai. This change made long stretches of the Canal unusable. With the Qing dynasty in serious difficulties during the second half of the nineteenth century, due to rebellions and pressure from foreign powers, work to restore the Canal could not be undertaken. In any case, by the mid-nineteenth century, coastal navigation was becoming much more competitive. Steamships soon began to ply along the China coast, so that the great expense of reopening the Grand Canal was no longer worthwhile.

6 Marco's journeys in China, part 1 – the route into China

Some of the most severe criticisms of Marco have arisen from the difficulties commentators have found in identifying the many places that he mentions and in tracing his routes around China. Perhaps only his failure to mention the Great Wall has generated greater censure. In fact, however, it is not very hard to identify the overwhelming majority of place-names included in his account, and his itineraries can, for the most part, be followed with ease. It is only necessary to understand that the geography of China has changed somewhat over the centuries and that, in particular, the names of places have varied. Many commentators have taken what seems to have been a highly anachronistic approach to Marco's geographical information, seeking to find the place-names that he gives on eighteenth- or nineteenth-century maps of China. Thus, attempts have been made in the past to identify Marco's 'Cuigiu' or 'Cuiju' with Guizhou province, even though the latter name did not come into use until the Ming dynasty (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 127n). Similarly, 'Namghin' or 'Nan-ghin' has sometimes been identified with the city currently called Nanjing, in Jiangsu province (MP/Hambis: 344n; MP/Marsden: 280n). Again, although the name had been applied to several different cities at various periods (including what is now Beijing, during the early Liao dynasty), it was not conferred upon its present holder until 1368. With work on Marco's place-names proceeding in such fashion, it is scarcely surprising that there have been difficulties in identifying them. Early commentators on Marco perhaps failed to realize that the names of Chinese towns and cities have tended to alter frequently during the course of Chinese history. The most common reason for this has been change in their administrative status. In order to explain this properly, it will be necessary to try to clarify some of the complexities of Chinese local administration. The structure of local government has, of course, changed considerably during the long period of Chinese history. Here, only some elucidation of the system as it existed immediately before and during the Yuan dynasty will be attempted. Unfortunately, it was particularly complicated under the Mongols, who added extra tiers to the structure, as well as reorganizing it quite frequently. This explanation will be kept as simple as possible.

XIAN: the basic unit of local government, more or less throughout Chinese history from several centuries BCE onwards, has been the xian (sometimes translated into English as 'county' or 'sub-prefecture'). This has always been a comparatively small unit, roughly comparable with an English county. Unlike English counties, however, xian existed within cities, somewhat like an urban district or a London borough. The size of a xian has varied over time. Today, there are something like two thousand xian, while during the reign of Khubilai Khan there were already more than eleven hundred, although the population then was only about 6 per cent of what it is today (YS: zhi 10, 884–5). Now, however, there is a much more complex local government structure below the xian level than ever existed in the past.

ZHOU: in general, xian were immediately subordinate to a larger administrative unit called a zhou (sometimes translated 'prefecture'). This unit only exists now in regions of China where allowance is made for some measure of autonomy for ethnic minorities, as the 'autonomous prefecture' (zizhi zhou). Under Khubilai Khan, there were 359 zhou.

FU: this was not a universal element in the administrative structure of the Yuan dynasty. During the reign of Khubilai Khan, there were only 33 fu. Where they existed, they were often immediately superior to the zhou. The fu was much used during the Qing dynasty, but is now obsolete.

LU: this was quite a large unit, superior to the zhou and the fu. There were 185 lu during the reign of Khubilai Khan. Lu only existed under the Song, Jin and Yuan dynasties.

SHENG: the sheng or province was an innovation of the Yuan dynasty. It is commonly said that there were twelve provinces of the Yuan empire, although this is in fact only an approximation. The number varied somewhat from time to time, as provinces were created, amalgamated or abolished. For example, the area that is now Fujian was at first a separate province, but later was merged into the province of Jiangzhe. For a time, there was a provincial administration for Champa, but this was abolished when attempts to incorporate that country fully into the empire were abandoned. The lu were immediately subordinate to the sheng.

The above scheme is complicated by the fact that some fu and zhou were not subordinated to a lu, but came directly under provincial control. There were also some xian that were directly subordinate to a lu. Most zhou were directly subordinate to a lu, but some were additionally subordinate to a fu. There were also some other units of local government, numerically less significant, that have been omitted above. One of these was the jun, which has to be mentioned as it was of some importance during the Song dynasty. There were no provinces in the Song empire, the highest unit of local administration being usually the lu. There were 23 lu under the Northern Song dynasty, plus four fu of equivalent rank, governing the areas around the

four capital cities. Below this tier of government, the situation was generally similar to that during the Yuan dynasty. There were, however, some 37 jun in the Northern Song empire, although there were only four during the reign of Khubilai Khan (JYZ: biao, 1; YS: zhi 10, 885). The jun, sometimes translated 'commandery', had originated during the period of the Tang dynasty as an administrative unit in military regions, but under the Song it became more or less just another division of local government. It could rank at the same level either as the fu or the zhou, or as the xian.

It is necessary to have some knowledge of these administrative units and their relationships to each other, because the names of the units had two distinct uses. As well as being applied to the unit as a whole, they were also used to designate the town or city that was the seat of the local government of the unit. Therefore, if the administrative status of an area changed, the name of the town that was its seat of government usually also changed (officially, at least). A town might be called 'Wanxian' while it was the administrative centre for a xian, but if the status of the xian was raised to that of a zhou, then the town would become 'Wanzhou'. Complications can arise because it was not infrequently the case that one and the same town was concurrently the seat of government of two or three units at different levels, say, of a xian, a zhou and a lu. The names used for the different units might be quite distinct, not merely the same name with 'xian', 'zhou' or 'lu' appended. It was also sometimes the case that the official name of the town was not the name that was in everyday use for it. This situation often arose because old names stuck and went on being used long after they had officially been superseded. For example, the present city of Nanjing ('Southern Capital') ceased to have the status of a capital (jing) at the end of the Ming dynasty. Under the Qing dynasty, it was officially called Jiangningfu, but it continued to be referred to as Nanjing in common parlance (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 182). Occasionally, the name in normal use for a town was not one that had ever had any official status. This situation occurred most frequently in areas inhabited mainly by non-Chinese ethnic groups, who had their own names for places, that were not always the ones used in official Chinese records. Examples of this will be encountered below. Yet a further complication is the fact that, on occasion, the seat of government of a xian, zhou, lu or other administrative unit was transferred from one town to another, without any change of name. In this way, the town that had formerly been known by the name of the xian, zhou or whatever ceased to be officially entitled to that name, which was transferred to the new administrative centre. An example of this is Mengzhou, in modern Henan province. Created in 843, during the Tang dynasty, its seat of government was originally in a town called Heyang (which was then called Mengzhou, of course). During the Jin dynasty, after the old name Heyang had fallen out of use, the seat of Mengzhou was moved to a different town nearby. The obvious tendency must then have been to refer to the two towns as the 'old' and 'new' zhou. This does indeed appear to have happened in

this case, for there is a reference to New and Old Mengzhou in the official Chinese history of the Yuan dynasty, where the proposal to dig a canal passing between the two is recorded (YS: liezhuan 51, 2411).

The following passage, translated from the official history of the Yuan dynasty, illustrates the complexities of the Chinese system of local government and the frequency of changes of administrative status and of name. Guangyuan is today a municipality in north-east Sichuan, on the Jialing River.

> Guangyuanlu . . . : during the early Tang dynasty, it was Lizhou, later changed to Yichangjun, then back to Lizhou again. During the Song dynasty, it was Lizhoulu. After the Duanping reign-period [1234–6], there was war, with not a year of peace. For seventeen years, the land was barren and the people were scattered. In Möngke Khan's third year [1253], Lizhou was established . . . In the fourteenth year of the Zhiyuan reign-period [1277], . . . it was changed to Guangyuanlu . . . It governed two xian, one fu and four zhou. The fu governed three xian and the zhou seven xian.
>
> (YS: zhi 12, 945–6)

Despite such intricacies, it should be evident that it ought not to be too difficult to identify the places mentioned by Marco, when it is considered that the great majority of them were comparatively important towns and cities. Most had at least the status of a zhou and, as already stated above, there were only 359 zhou in the whole of the Yuan empire during the reign of Khubilai Khan. There had been 242 during the Northern Song dynasty, when the empire was, of course, much smaller in area. Even towns of xian status were not extremely numerous, with rather more than 1,100 under Khubilai and 1,200 in the Song empire (JYZ: biao, 1). These numbers are, of course, much reduced by Marco's indications of the approximate locations of places, which usually greatly narrow the range of possibilities. The only real problems arise with the few towns that Marco notices that did not have at least xian status, for the geographical sections of the official dynastic histories do not normally include mention of these. Fortunately, there are other sources that provide more detail. One that has proved particularly useful in researching the place-names given by Marco is the *Yuanfeng Jiuyu Zhi*, or 'Record of the Nine Regions during the Yuanfeng reign-period' (see under 'JYZ' in the bibliography). This gives much more detailed information, including distances between places, and names of towns of less than xian status. Although it dates from about two hundred years before Marco's time, many of the place-names it records remained in use. Unfortunately, its coverage is restricted to the area of the Northern Song empire, which was comparatively rather limited. The 'Jiuyu' or 'Nine Regions' require some explanation. It was traditionally believed that, in very early times, China had been divided into nine major administrative regions. Later, 'Nine

Regions' was often used simply to mean the whole Chinese empire. This is probably what was in Marco's mind when he referred to the 'nine kingdoms of Manzi' (MP/Latham: 222, 239: MP/Hambis: 366, 387). He seems to have taken this legendary division literally.

Marco entered China from the north-west, descending from the mountains that border what is today Xinjiang into the Tarim Basin. He then travelled along the southern side of the Basin, skirting the Taklimakan Desert and crossing the Desert of Lop (south of the lake of Lop Nur) before arriving at the town that is now Dunhuang, in north-west Gansu province. He then travelled through the Gansu Corridor and turned somewhat towards the north again, to cross modern Ningxia and enter Inner Mongolia and northern Hebei, finally reaching Shangdu. He makes a number of digressions to describe places off this route (some of which he may not have visited personally). The itinerary is detailed below (MP/Latham: 80–108; MP/Hambis: 129–83).

Cascar is Kashgar or Kashi, in the far west of modern Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Samarcande (Samarcan) is Samarkand, which was certainly not on Marco's route and is not in China, of course, but in Uzbekistan. Marco's father and uncle must have been there on their first journey to the Far East (it is close to Bukhara), but there is no certainty that Marco ever visited the city.



Figure 6.1 The Sunday Bazaar in Kashgar. Marco must have witnessed scenes not very different from this.

Yarcan (Karkan) is Yarkand or Shache, back on Marco's route and south-east of Kashgar.

Cotan (Kotan) is Khotan or Hetian. Here, Marco's itinerary coincides with that of the earlier traveller Xuan Zhuang, a Buddhist monk who journeyed from China to India and back during the seventh century. In his record of his travels, Xuan Zhuang describes this place under the name 'Qusadanna' (Kustana). Like Marco, he noted that much fruit was grown there. In his day, though, the people were Buddhists, for Islam had not yet made its appearance (XYJ: 296).

Pem (Peyn, Pein) is Keriya or Yutian, or a former town in the near vicinity. According to Xuan Zhuang, there was a town called 'Pimo' some 330 li east of Khotan (XYJ: 303). Stein's attempt to identify this town with the ruined Uzun Tati (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 595n) seems unlikely to be correct. Uzun Tati is too close to Khotan. Xuan Zhuang also mentions a Pimo River (Pimo Chuan), east of which there was desert for more than 200 li (XYJ: 304). It seems improbable that the town of Pimo would have stood two or three days' journey away from the river that bore the same name. Yet the ruins of Uzun Tati lie about that distance west of the Keriya River, which must surely be Xuan Zhuang's Pimo River. Xuan Zhuang says that, after crossing the desert beyond the Pimo River, there is a town called Nirang in a marshy area. There is indeed desert beyond the Keriya River, as far as the Niya River, where there is some marshland. 'Nirang' and 'Niya' are probably two different Chinese transcriptions of the same local, non-Chinese name (Feng Chengjun 1980: 69). Pimo, Marco's 'Pein' or 'Pem', must have stood on the Keriya River, even if not on exactly the site of modern Yutian. Xuan Zhuang's account of this region is of great interest. Nirang or Niya would have been near modern Minfeng on the Niya River. After this, according to Xuanzhuang, the route crossed desert where it was easy to get lost and strange noises were often heard (XYJ: 304–5). Marco says similar things of the Desert of Lop.

Ciarcian (Ciartiam, Ciarchian) is Charchan or Qiemo on the Charchan River. Below Qiemo, the course of this river turns to run roughly east-north-east for a considerable distance. The bed is often dry from a short distance beyond Qiemo, but there would usually be water below the surface of the land. This would make it reasonably easy to follow the river valley until it finally loses itself in the desert.

Lop is Lob or Luobuzhuang, which still exists north of modern Ruoqiang (Charklikh), more or less exactly where the course of the Charchan River becomes indistinct. It stands near the south-eastern limit of the Taklimakan Desert, where it becomes possible to cross the Tarim Basin from south to north by following the valleys of the Charchan and Tarim Rivers. This settlement is some considerable way west-south-west of the Lop Nur lake and marshes, which explains why the distance that Marco gives from Lop to

Saciu is so great. It is, in fact, almost 600 kilometres in a straight line from Lob to Dunhuang.

Saciu (Sachiu, Sachion) is Shazhou, now Dunhuang in the far north-west of Gansu province. The old town was on the western side of the modern one. Remains of its walls, made of compacted earth, can still be seen today. The name Shazhou was applied to the town and the district it governed early in the seventh century, under the Tang dynasty. After about the middle of the eighth century, it came under Tibetan control. Later, it formed part of the Gansu Uighur state and then of the Xi Xia kingdom. It was officially named Shazhou again in 1277 and became the seat of a lu three years later (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 128). Marco notes that there were many Buddhist temples and monasteries there (MP/Latham: 85; MP/Hambis: 142). Dunhuang is, of course, famous today for the Mogao cave-temples near the town.

Tangut (Tanguth) is Xi Xia, or, in Marco's time, the area of what had previously been the Xi Xia state. The region west of this was part of the Western Liao or Karakhitay empire before the Mongol conquest.

Camul (Kamul) is Hami, Kumul or Khamil. Although Marco includes it in Tangut, it was not, in fact, within the borders of the Xi Xia state. It came under Mongol control even before the conquest of Xi Xia, however, and had perhaps come to be regarded more or less as part of the same region. Marco digresses from his direct route into China to describe this and the following two places.

Carachoço (Carachoto) is Kara Khojo, called Gaochang in Chinese. Only the Toledo manuscript makes mention of this place. Marco is correct in including it in Uighuristan (Iuguristan). It was, in fact, the Uighur capital. Today, its ruins can still be seen, some 40 kilometres (25 miles) east of the modern city of Turfan (Turpan). The city was probably abandoned in favour of a new site at about the end of the Yuan dynasty or early in the Ming dynasty. Marco comments on the 'excellent wine' from the area, which is still famous for its grapes. He also says how intensely cold it is there in winter (MP/Latham: 89; MP/Hambis: 148). The Turfan Depression, which falls to 154 metres (about 500 feet) below sea level, is noted for its extremes of temperature. It is the hottest place in China in summer, though it does not, in fact, have the lowest winter temperatures.

Ghinghin Talas (Chinchitalas, Chingintalas) cannot be identified with certainty. There is today a town on the route from Gansu into Xinjiang, very close to the border between the two, called Xingxingxia, the 'Xingxing Gorge'. This name must, I think, derive from the same source as Ghinghintalas. In Mongolian, 'tala' means a field or steppe. The cognate Uygur word, with the same meaning, is 'dala'. The 'gorge' may well have been the approach, from the south, to the plain of 'Ghinghin'. This would then be the area



Figure 6.2 Part of the ruins of Gaochang (Khara Khojo) as they are today.

between the Bei Shan in Gansu and the eastern end of the Tian Shan (the Karlik Tagh). There is still some water in this area and it was probably less dry in the past. Remains of ancient towns exist in the area, for example, near Xiamaya. This region may well have been of some importance during the Mongol period because it lay on a route from eastern Turkestan (modern Xinjiang) to Mongolia. There is today a motorable road across it from Hami, passing through Mingshui ('Clear Waters', east-north-east of Xingxingxia) and going on to Ejina in Inner Mongolia. From there, the road continues to the region that Marco calls Tenduk, near modern Baotou. There appear to be springs or wells at regular points along this route and it may have been a caravan trail in the past (Lattimore 1962: 51–2, 55–6). Marco mentions the mining of iron or steel and asbestos in this region (MP/Latham: 89; MP/Hambis: 149). There are still iron mines on the north side of the eastern Tian Shan today, but I have not been able to identify any asbestos mine in precisely this area, although this mineral does occur in several places in Xinjiang.

Succiu (Sukchur, Succuir) is Suzhou, now Jiuquan. Formerly, 'Su' was pronounced 'Suk' or 'Siuk' (Karlgren 1964: 268 [1028a]). Final consonants such as this have now disappeared completely from Modern Standard Chinese (Putonghua), except for the nasals '-n' and '-ng'. This seems to have happened only within the past three or four centuries, however. They still exist in some dialects. The name Suzhou dates back to 602, during the Sui

dynasty. The town became the seat of a lu under the Mongols (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 170).

Campçio (Campichu, Kampion) is Ganzhou, now Zhangye. The final of the first syllable was formerly '–m' rather than '–n' (Karlgren 1964: 162 [606a]). Marco is right to say that this was the capital of the province. The Mongols created the province of Gansu in 1281, but long before that Ganzhou had been capital of the Uighur khanate in this area. Zhangye still has a very large Recumbent Buddha in the Da Fo Si (Great Buddha Temple), which was founded under Xi Xia. The existing statue is believed to be the original from that period (Dunnell 1996: 78–82). It may, therefore, be one of those seen here by Marco.

Eçina (Etzina, Ezina) is Ejina Banner in Inner Mongolia. The old city, also known as Karakhoto and, in Chinese, Heishui, stood to the south-east of the present town. Almost two thousand years ago, it was the city of Juyan in the Xihai prefecture of the Han dynasty. During the Yuan dynasty, it became the seat of Yijinailu (YS: zhi 12, 955). It was important because of its location on the easiest north–south route across the western half of the Gobi Desert. Marco correctly notes that it is on the northern edge of this desert (MP/Latham: 92; MP/Hambis: 154). The Ruo River flows roughly northwards from the Qilian Mountains across the Gansu Corridor and into the Gobi, where it splits into two channels that end at lakes north of Ejina. It was by this route that Chinggis Khan's troops attacked the Xi Xia state.

Caracorom (Karakoran) is Karakorum, the original capital city of the Mongols. Its site is now well known, on the Orkhon River in what was formerly Outer Mongolia and is today the Mongolian Republic. It was visited by William of Rubruck, who describes it in his account of his journey to Mongolia (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 183–4). Karakorum was not walled until 1235 (Morgan 1986: 114; YS: benji 2, 20). It lost its status as a capital when Khubilai became Great Khan and went into a decline. Little remains of it today.

Ergiuul (Erguiul, Erginul) can certainly be identified with Wuwei, formerly Liangzhou and Xiliangfu. Marco seems to use Tangut names here (see also Egrigaia below). Perhaps 'Ergui[ul]' is derived from the Tangut version of 'Wuwei'. As Marco says, this area was a kingdom under the Yuan (MP/Latham: 103; MP/Hambis: 176). The palace of the Yongchang Wang was here (YS: zhi 12, 955).

Silinggiu (Singui, Signi, Sigui) is Xizhou, now Lintao in southern Gansu province. It was officially called Xizhou under the Northern Song dynasty and also, until 1142, under the Jin dynasty (JS: juan 26, 407). The name no doubt continued to be used thereafter. It was not within the Xi Xia kingdom, but was taken from Jin by the Mongols at the same time as they conquered Tangut, in 1227 (JS: juan 17, 263). Probably, therefore, it was administered

by them (at least for a time) as if part of Tangut. The identification of this place with Xining in modern Qinghai province, which goes back to Marsden (MP/Marsden: 135–6n), is surely wrong. Xining is not on the route from Wuwei into China, but is separated from it by high mountains. It was in any case apparently not a place of any great importance during the early Yuan dynasty. The official dynastic history says: 'During the early Yuan dynasty, it was allotted to the Imperial Son-in-Law Zhangji. In 1286, Xiningzhou . . . was established' (YS: zhi 12, 956). The description of the wildlife of the area also fits Xizhou better than Xining. The pheasant with a very long tail that Marco mentions (MP/Latham: 105; MP/Hambis: 177) is undoubtedly the Reeves's Pheasant (see Chapter 9). This is a bird of forested country at low to moderate altitudes. It is recorded as occurring in south-east Gansu but not in Qinghai (De Schauensee 1984: 194; MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000: 36). There are musk deer in both Qinghai and Gansu, but they must always have been more common in southern Gansu than in eastern Qinghai, for their principal habitat is forest and scrub and they feed mainly on shoots of willow, rhododendron and other shrubs (Sheng Helin (ed.) 1992: 57–81). The Xining area is mainly too dry to support forest.

Egrigaia (Eggaya, Egygaia, Egregia) is the area around Yinchuan in modern Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. The Mongolian name for Yinchuan is Irgai (Prejevalsky 1876: i, 241n). It must be presumed that both this and Marco's Egrigaia derive from the same Tangut original.

Calacian (Calachan, Kalacha) is Alashan or Helanshan. This is the name of the range of mountains west of modern Yinchuan. This city was capital of the Xi Xia state, under the name Zhongxing. The Xi Xia rulers had a palace near Yinchuan, at the foot of the range, which was called the Alashan Palace (MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 282–3n; Prejevalsky 1876: i, 241–2; Dunnell 1996: 45, 52). It seems likely that Marco uses the name Alashan to refer to Zhongxing, which was the chief city of the province.

Tenduc (Tenduk) is Tiande, which was roughly north-west of modern Urad Front Banner, on the northern loop of the Yellow River, in Inner Mongolia. The 'de' of the name was formerly pronounced 'dẹk' (Karlgren 1964: 243 [919k]). The plain of Tenduc was the area of flat land between the Yin Shan mountains to the north and the Yellow River on the south. Tiande was a jun under the Liao dynasty, but was abolished by the Jin. The exact site of the seat of government of Tiande moved several times. In one case, the town was washed away by flooding of the Yellow River (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 30). Nestorian Christianity is known from sources other than Marco's book to have flourished in this area in the thirteenth century. Ruins clearly showing Nestorian influence have been found there (Lattimore 1962: 221–31).

Sindaciu (Sindachu, Sindichin) is Xuandezhou, which is now Xuanhua in north-western Hebei province. It was Xuandezhou under the Jin dynasty. In

the early Yuan dynasty, it became Xuanningfu. In 1263, its name was changed to Xuandefu. In 1266, it was changed again, 'because of an earthquake', to Shunningfu. Through all these changes, the name Xuande continued to be used for the xian which had its seat in the same town (YS: zhi 10, 888). Clearly, the many changes of name under the Mongols were largely ignored and the old Jin name continued to be used until Marco's time in China. Indeed, in the official history of the Yuan dynasty, in the annals for 1282, there is mention of Xuandezhou (YS: benji 12, 163).

Ydifu (Idifa, Idica) cannot be identified with any degree of certainty. It may be that this is not the name of a town at all, but is derived from 'yinchang', which simply means an area where silver is mined. The likely romanization of 'yinchang', using Marco's and Rustichello's usual system, would have been 'Incian', or something very similar, which is not impossibly far removed from the variant 'Idica'. Silver was produced in more than one place not very far distant from Xuandezhou (YS: zhi 43, 1591). The closest were near Dadu (Beijing) and Yunzhou (still so called, just north of modern Chicheng in northern Hebei province). It is also possible that 'Ydifu' might have been corrupted from Yunzhou, though the resemblance is not very close.

Ciagannor (Changanor, Chagan Nor) is Chagan Nur, Mongolian for the 'White Lake'. There are several lakes with this name, but most of them are well removed from any possible route taken by Marco at this point. One is in Inner Mongolia, north of any direct route from Tiande or Xuanhua to Shangdu. Another is in north-west Hebei, on the border with Inner Mongolia. It is this last lake that seems most likely to be the one intended. It is surrounded by marshes, which would suit the cranes that Marco says occurred here (MP/Latham: 107; MP/Hambis: 182). Assuming that Marco's route did not in fact pass through Xuanhua, which he mentions only because of its importance in arms manufacture, then this lake is in the right location, directly between the Tiande area and the site of Shangdu.

Ciandu (Shandu, Chandu) is Shangdu. The city has long been in ruins, but its site is well-known. It is on the north bank of the Shandian River (the upper Luan River), east of today's Plain Blue Banner, Zhenglanqi, in Inner Mongolia. This is almost directly north of Beijing. Its earlier mention under the name of Clemeinfu, that is, Kaipingfu, has already been noted in Chapter 5.

Taidu is Dadu, now Beijing. As described in Chapter 5, Khubilai Khan had a new capital city built, from which grew modern Beijing.

It can be seen that there are only a few problems with identifying the places that Marco mentions along this route into China and on the various digressions from it that he describes. Of his itineraries in China, however, this one is the most difficult to research in Chinese sources. This is because the major Song dynasty sources cover only a small part of the route, for most of it lay

outside the area of the Song empire. There is, unfortunately, no official history of Xi Xia, which was not considered to have been a legitimate dynasty. Even the geographical section of the official history of the Yuan dynasty gives sparse information about places west of Dunhuang. For towns in the 'Western regions', there is very little more than a list of names. In spite of all this, of the 26 place-names of this itinerary, including the digressions, there is serious uncertainty about the identification of only two, Ghinghin Talas and Ydifu.

7 Marco's journeys in China, part 2 – Khanbalikh to Caragian and Mien

This itinerary (MP/Latham: 163–93; MP/Hambis: 267–324) is probably an amalgam of at least two or three journeys made by Marco to the south-west. One of these is said in some versions of the book to have been his first mission for the Great Khan (MP/Latham: 40; MP/Hambis: 58). For reasons that will be clarified below, it must have been made prior to 1280. He must also have been in the region later, however, after the conquest of Myanmar (Burma, Marco's Mien) by the Mongols. He may, in fact, have made two further visits, one when he travelled to Bengal from Burma, and a third when he returned via southern Yunnan and north-west Vietnam. It is also possible that these two latter journeys may have been more or less one, with Marco visiting Bengal from Myanmar, then returning to Myanmar and perhaps to Yunnan, before travelling back to Chengdu via Vietnam. The itineraries within China which Marco chose to describe must have been those with which he was most familiar, that is, ones which he had travelled over, at least in part, on more than one occasion. As well as the itinerary discussed in this chapter, he also describes a route from Khanbalikh to Çaiton (Quanzhou), which he probably covered at least as far as Hangzhou on several different occasions (see Chapter 8). I can see no reason at all to doubt that Marco made these journeys in person. There is much accurate detail given, often relating to things which other travellers simply did not notice (at least, as far as we can tell now from surviving accounts). In any case, doubts seem to have arisen mainly because of difficulties in identifying the places that Marco mentions, but I have been able to solve almost all such problems. In most cases, there was little difficulty in doing so. For example, despite the fact that it was quite recently said to be best treated as 'another problem insoluble at this distance' (Wood 1995: 63), the location of Marco's Iaci or Yachi is in fact described quite precisely in the official history of the Yuan dynasty (see below). Indeed, the name Yachi occurs many times in this history, although not in its geographical section. This is presumably because it was never the official name of any town of xian status or above.

Leaving the city of Khanbalikh, on a long journey 'as an emissary towards the west' (MP/Latham: 163; MP/Hambis: 267), Marco soon arrived

at a large river crossed by a noteworthy bridge. His description of the bridge contains inaccuracies, as has often been stated, but it must be presumed that he made no detailed notes about it. As I have already suggested, his notes must have been made principally to allow him to make reports to Khubilai Khan. As this bridge was so close to Khanbalikh, it would have been familiar to the Khan and it would have been unnecessary to describe it to him. This journey took Marco to regions that were afterwards little visited by foreigners until recent times. In his day, parts of the itinerary must actually have been quite difficult and even dangerous, though he makes little comment on this (MP/Latham: 163–93; MP/Hambis: 267–324).

Pulisanghin (Pulisangan, Pulisangium) is Lugouqiao. The name is Persian and is actually that of the bridge rather than the river. It may be translated either as 'Bridge on the Sanggan River' or 'Stone Bridge'. This river has borne several names over the course of history, but the name Sanggan was certainly current during the Yuan dynasty. It is still applied to the upper reaches of the river. Downstream, near Beijing, it is now usually called the Yongding River, but it did not receive this name until the Qianlong period of the Qing dynasty. Yongding means 'For ever calm' and was given to the river, which had frequently caused problems by flooding, after major work had been undertaken to fix its course and prevent it overflowing its banks. The large Guanting Reservoir, a fairly short distance upstream of Lugouqiao, has controlled these fluctuations since its completion in 1954 (Ding Li *et al.* 1990: 583).

Giogiu (Gouza, Giogu, Gioguy, Geogui) is Zhuozhou in modern Hebei province, just outside the borders of Beijing Municipality. It was reduced in status and became Zhuoxian from 1913 until 1986, when it was again elevated to become a municipality.

Achbaluch (Ak-Balik), which is only mentioned in the Toledo manuscript, and is said to be about halfway between Zhuozhou and Taiyuan (see below), must be Zhendingfu, now Zhengding. This is in modern Hebei provice, not far north of the provincial capital, Shijiazhuang. It is in the right location, on a major route from Zhuozhou and Dadu to Taiyuan, and was the most important city for some distance in any direction in Marco's time. Shijiazhuang has now outstripped it in importance. This prominence was only acquired recently, however, as a result of the building of railways. 'Zhuang', indeed, means 'village'.

Taianfu (Tainfu) is Taiyuanfu, which is, of course, no longer a fu. It is the provincial capital of modern Shanxi province. The name is ancient, having been used for more than two thousand years, although the exact site of the town to which it was applied has varied a little. It was given to the city which now bears the name during the Northern Song dynasty (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 34).

Pianfu is Pingyangfu, now Linfen. Marco's route here follows the Fen River downstream from Taiyuan across central Shanxi. This town became Pingyangfu under the Northern Song dynasty, in 1116, and was raised to the status of a lu under the Mongols (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 55).

Caiciu (Thaigin, Caycui, Chaicui) is Xiezhou. This name has been wrongly transcribed as 'Jiezhou' by some commentators. The character is usually read 'Jie', but not in this place-name. It was formerly pronounced 'Gai' (Karlgren 1964: 228 [861a]). The town still bears the same name today. There is a large and fine Guan Di Miao at Xiezhou, which was founded during the Sui dynasty, in AD 589. It was enlarged under the Song and Ming dynasties but destroyed by fire in 1702 and then rebuilt (Guojia Wenwu Shiye Guanliju (ed.) 1981: 192–3). This must be the castle or fortress which Marco mentions here (MP/Latham: 165; MP/Hambis: 279). Marco's story about 'King Dor' seems to derive from several semi-historical tales that relate, not to any ruler of the Jin (Gold) dynasty, but to episodes in the history of the ancient state of Jin, which was situated in what later became Shanxi. The names sound almost the same (only the tones are different) but are written with completely different characters in Chinese. This, I believe, is evidence that Marco heard these stories in Chinese, but did not understand them properly. It suggests that he had some knowledge (if imperfect) of the Chinese language, at least in its spoken form. There was a tradition current in China in the past that the capital city of the ancient state of Jin was, at least for a time, close to Xiezhou (Legge 1960: v, 136). The fact that this does not seem to have been correct is immaterial. Presumably there was, in the Guan Di Miao, a memorial shrine to the ancient rulers of Jin, which is the hall containing portraits of kings that Marco describes.

Marco's story about the Golden King (or King Dor, Roi d'Or) has certain similarities with the story of Baili Xi, though Marco has clearly produced a very distorted version of it. The tale existed in several differing versions, however, so that what Marco was originally told may have been already somewhat confused. According to one variant of the story, Baili Xi was a high-ranking minister in the small state of Yu, which was adjacent to the larger state of Jin. The ruler of Jin offered gifts to the ruler of Yu in return for permission to pass through Yu with an army to attack another state. Baili Xi realized that this could only lead to the annexation of Yu by Jin, but saw that his ruler wanted to take the gifts and would not listen to good advice. He therefore kept quiet. After Jin had indeed annexed Yu, he followed his ruler into captivity in Jin, where he refused to accept any office. Later, he was able to escape to another large state further south, called Chu, where he became a keeper of cattle. The ruler of Qin, hearing that he was a man of great ability, managed to bring him to his own state, where he made him chief minister (Legge 1960: ii, 366–7; Lau (ed.) 1970: 275). Thus, Baili Xi fell from being a high minister to herding cattle but was then raised to

high office again. This may have become mixed with the story of Duke Hui of Jin, who was captured by the ruler of Qin (in 645 BCE) but was later released and sent back to rule Jin again (Legge 1960: v, 166–9; SJ: ii, 589, v, 1653–4). The resemblance of the stories is heightened by the fact that the rulers of both Jin and Qin were, at least theoretically, vassals of the King of Zhou: in Chinese, Zhou Wang. Marco may perhaps have confused this Wang with the Wang Khan (Ung Khan) whom he identified with Prester John (MP/Latham: 22, 93; MP/Hambis: 156). There is also the possibility that the very well-known stories about Chong Er may have been involved, too. Chong Er spent time among 'barbarians' and then also in Chu, before being sent from Chu to Qin and placed on the throne of Jin (SJ: v, 1659–61). Whatever the precise origins of the various elements of Marco's story, it seems almost certain that it derived from tales connected with the ancient state of Jin, which Marco confused with the much later Jin dynasty.

Cacionfu (Cacianfu, Kachanfu) is Hezhongfu, now Puzhou. The name Hezhong was first conferred on the town in 720 (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 160). This city is on the east side of the Yellow River (Caramoran, Karamoran), so there is definitely some confusion in Marco's account here. It seems possible that the text is corrupt, or that the whole section on Xiezhou and King Dor was inserted after this part of the book was originally completed, in a way that damaged the sense of the original. This would explain why, in some versions of the text, there is mention of Cacionfu immediately after leaving Pianfu and the mention of Caiciu (Xiezhou), with the story of King Dor, is added as a kind of afterthought (MP/Hambis: 279; MP/Marsden: 227; MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 13). It would be quite amazing, however, if there were absolutely no mistakes anywhere in Marco's account (especially as he did not actually write it himself). Very few books have ever been written that contain no errors at all. About two days' journey west of the Yellow River here, there was the town of Tongzhou, now Dali in Shaanxi, or possibly Marco might have reached Huazhou, now Huaxian, in that time (JYZ: 105, 109). These places were on a standard route towards Xi'an. Marco's route from Taiyuan to Hezhongfu follows very closely that of the modern railway line from Taiyuan to Xi'an.

Quengianfu (Kenjanfu, Kenzanfu) is Chang'anfu, now Xi'an, the provincial capital of Shaanxi. It was national capital of the Chinese empire under the Former Han, Sui and Tang dynasties. Mangalai, mentioned here, died in 1280, so presumably Marco made this journey for the first time before that date, or at least visited Chang'an before that date (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 24, 31n; MP/Hambis: 285; MP/Latham: 168). As already noted above, the prologue to Marco's book refers to him making a journey to Caragian as his first mission for Khubilai Khan. This could well have been during the period 1276 to 1279. He must have passed this way again later, if he was in Yunnan after the Mongol invasion of Myanmar (see below). Mangalai was created Prince of Anxi only in 1272 and the palace was probably built the

following year. Archaeological investigations were carried out at the site of the palace, on the north-east side of Xi'an, in 1957 (Wu Bolun 1979: 253–4). It should be noted here that, if Marco's account of his time in China were entirely undated, it would be possible to set it into the correct period to within a few years because of the various datable facts that he mentions.

Cuncun (Kunkin) is Hanzhong, which bears the same name today. It is in the south-west of Shaanxi province. The name first came into use as early as the Warring States period, several hundred years BCE (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 73–4). It was used for a jun in this area during the Northern Song dynasty (JYZ: 353). The seat of the jun was originally at a town called Nanzheng, that was east of Hanzhong city. It was not the same place as today's Nanzheng, which is a short distance west-south-west of Hanzhong. During the Song dynasty, administration of the jun was moved to the site of modern Hanzhong (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 105).

Acbalec Mangi (Achbaluch Manji, Acbalec Manzi, Ak-balik Manzi) must be Hanzhong city. The situation, 'where the country becomes level', is right for the vicinity of Hanzhong, which lies in a wide valley surrounded on all sides by mountainous country. It was also the most important settlement for some distance in any direction at the period.

The boundary between the Jin and Song empires in the west ran along the Qinling mountains, north of the Han River, but south of the main crest of the range until the vicinity of Taibai Shan. All of the Hanzhong plain was within the Southern Song empire. Approaching from the north, it was the first area with large settlements inside 'Mangi'. At about this period, there was a route from Xi'an along the Wei valley to the vicinity of Meixian, which then turned through the mountains and led to Hanzhong and thence into Sichuan (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 45–6). This was probably the route which Marco followed.

Sindufu (Sindafu, Sindinfu, Syndyfu) is Chengdufu, which is, of course, no longer a fu, but just Chengdu. The name has been in use since at least as early as the Warring States period. The story of the division of the city among three kings is probably not a garbled version of Three Kingdoms history, as has been suggested (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 38n). It more likely relates to a later period, either the early thirteenth century (MP/Yule-Cordier: iii, 79), or the tenth century, the time of the short-lived Former Shu kingdom. The capital of Former Shu was at Chengdu. Wang Jian, who founded the kingdom, had eleven sons, all of whom were made kings (in Chinese, wang) (XWS: Qian Shu Shijia 3, 508–18). Marco's knowledge of Chinese history before the reign of Khubilai Khan was clearly very limited, however, and usually inaccurate.

Tebet (Thebeth) is Tibet, but Marco here talks of eastern Tibet, which has for a long time been part of Sichuan province. Nevertheless, until the middle of the twentieth century, Tibet was very frequently thought of as starting at

Kangding (formerly often known as Tatsienlu, Tachienlu or Dartsendo). The border of the Song empire was just west of Chengdu and Yazhou (modern Ya'an) (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 52), so that virtually all of the mountainous area of what is now western Sichuan was then 'Tibet'. Marco is correct to say, however, that Tibet was divided into several kingdoms (MP/Latham: 173; MP/Hambis: 294). Indeed, the number of eight that he gives is probably too few.

It is interesting that Marco should actually have spent such a long time passing through 'Tibet'. Most versions of the book tell of a journey of twenty days in desolate country and then some more time in an inhabited region (MP/Latham: 172; MP/Hambis: 291). With the five days taken to reach 'Tibet' from Chengdu, this gives something like a total of a month to travel from Chengdu to Gaindu, modern Xichang (see below). The direct road distance today between Chengdu and Xichang is some 525 kilometres (330 miles) and would scarcely involve passing through 'Tibetan' country at all. Marco should have been able to travel from Chengdu southwards to Jiazhou (Jiadingfu, now Leshan) before entering very mountainous country. Beyond this was Lizhou (near modern Hanyuan on the Dadu River), also part of the Song empire and presumably, therefore, reasonably 'civilized'. There was only a short stretch of wild country between Lizhou and Gaindu. It seems likely that Marco took a different route. When Khubilai had led the Mongol armies southward across western Sichuan to attack the Kingdom of Dali, he had passed through Luding in the Dadu River valley, some distance upstream of Hanyuan (Li Kunsheng 1981: 45). Luding was on one of the main routes from the Sichuan Basin into Tibet. It may well be that Marco took this road, from Chengdu to Yazhou (Ya'an) and then over the Erlangshan pass to the Dadu valley. Perhaps part of his mission was to see what condition this area was in, some 25 years after Khubilai had marched through it. It seems unlikely, indeed, that the devastation of which Marco speaks (MP/Latham: 171; MP/Hambis: 290) had persisted since the reign of Möngke. There had been campaigns since that time, to subdue the Tibetans of this region. For example, in 1268, Mangghudai was ordered to lead 6,000 troops to attack the Xifan (Tibetans of western Sichuan and adjacent areas) and Jiandu (Marco's Gaindu: see below) (YS: benji 6, 73). The devastation may have resulted largely from such later campaigns, as Mongol patience wore thin with the recalcitrant Tibetans.

Gaindu (Caindu, Kaindu) is Jiandu, now Xichang in Sichuan province. The town was officially called Jianchang at this period, but the name Jiandu seems to have been frequently used for it. Jianchang had been within the Kingdom of Dali and was part of Yunnan province under the Yuan. As early as the Former Han dynasty, there had been a xian in this area, called Qiongdu. It took its name from the local inhabitants, the Qiongdu Yi or Qiongdu 'barbarians' (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 49; Rock 1947: 49n). This name persisted for a long time, for during the Song dynasty a

local chieftain was awarded the title of 'King of Qiongdu' (Qiongdu Wang) (YS: zhi 13, 970). There are numerous references to Jiandu in the official history of the Yuan dynasty, although not in its geographical section. The most important ones are in the records for 1273 and 1274. Late in 1273, troops were despatched from Sichuan to attack the Jiandu Man ('Man' are 'southern barbarians'). Fighting may have begun earlier, for an attack on Jiandu is recorded in 1272, with a series of battles followed by a major invasion of Jiandu territory (YS: liezhuan 19, 2037). Jiandu then capitulated to the Mongols. In the following year, the 'Jiandu Ningyuan duhufu' was established (YS: benji 8, 96). The duhufu was an administrative unit that had formerly been used in border regions during the Han and Tang dynasties. It is possible that here this is an error for either 'qianhufu' or 'wanhufu', which were administrative divisions that were in common use in border regions under the Mongols. They were the seats of an official governing, respectively, one thousand families (qianhu) and ten thousand families (wanhu). One of the local histories for this area records the creation of a qianhu and later a wanhu in the 1270s (Rock 1947: 416). However, there is at least one other instance of the establishment of a duhufu by the Mongols, in Uighuristan in 1281 (Allsen 1983: 256). What is important here, however, is the association of the names 'Jiandu' and 'Ningyuan'. During the Qing dynasty, the town that is now Xichang was Ningyuanfu (Shu Xincheng *et al.* (eds) 1947: 429). It seems highly probable that the Qiongdu Yi and the Jiandu Man were one and the same people. 'Qiongdu' and 'Jiandu' must be variant Chinese versions of the same non-Chinese name. The initial consonants of both words would formerly have been plosives rather than affricates, 'K' and 'G' instead of 'Q' and 'J' (Karlgren 1964: 80 [249a], 302 [1172s]). This makes it very clear that Marco's Gaindu must be the same as Jiandu. The connections between Jiandu and Qiongdu, and Jiandu and Ningyuan, make the identification of Gaindu with modern Xichang more or less certain. The final confirmation is Marco's mention of a lake here (MP/Latham: 174; MP/Hambis: 295). This is the Qiong Hai, which lies just to the south-east of the city. There are not very many lakes of any size in this area.

Brius (river) is the upper Yangtze, called the Dri Chhu in Tibetan. In Chinese, it is usually called the Jinsha Jiang now, where it flows through Yunnan and south-west Sichuan.

Caragian (Karaian, Karajang) is the country of the 'Black Southern Barbarians', the Wu Man. 'Kara' is Mongol for 'black'. 'Jang' is of less certain meaning. It may originally have meant 'north' in Tibetan and have come to be applied to the people of the Lijiang area of Yunnan (Rock 1947: 60–1n). Whatever the origins of the name Karajang, it undoubtedly referred to the Wu Man, for the official history of the Yuan dynasty expressly equates the two (YS: liezhuan 8, 1882). The Wu Man were one of the main peoples of the Kingdom of Dali, which became the Mongol province of Yunnan.

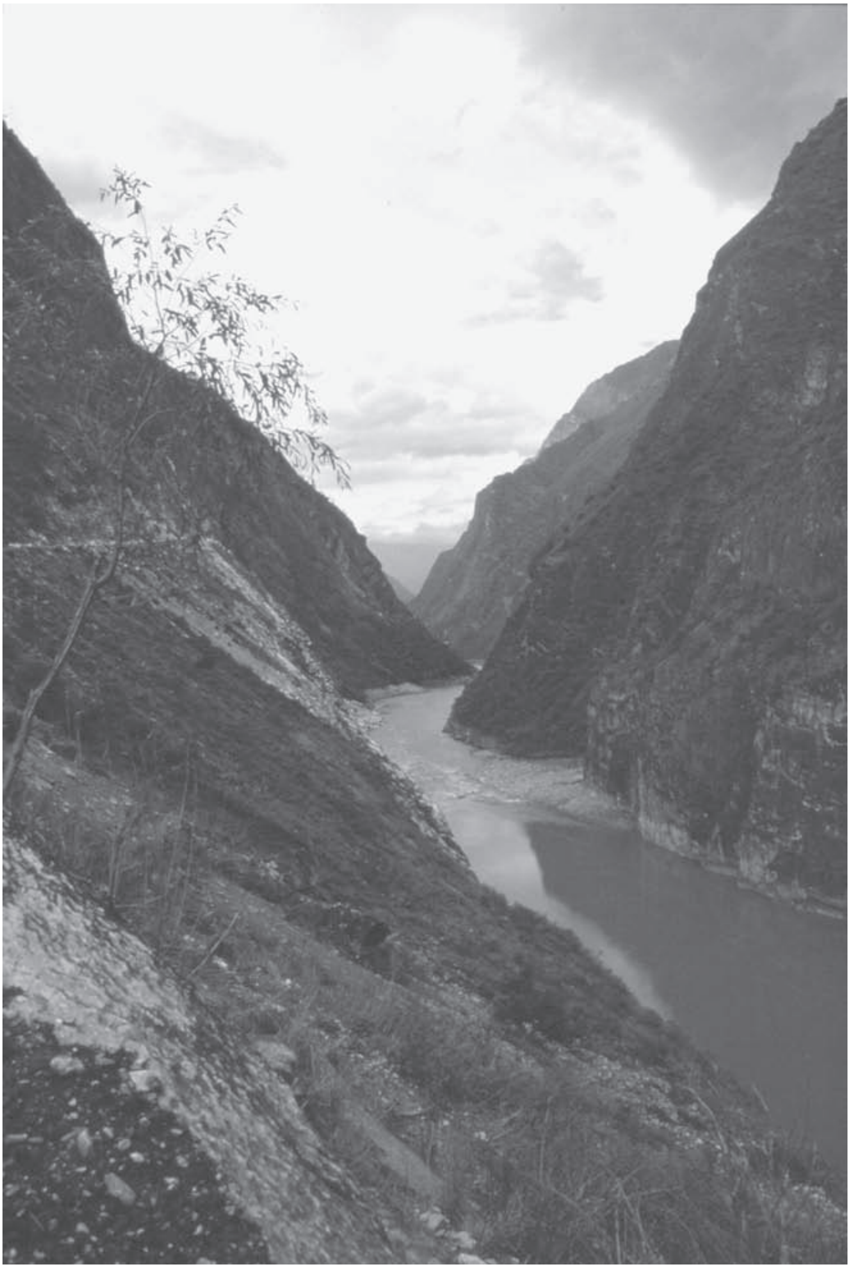


Figure 7.1 The Yangtze River or Jinsha Jiang in Yunnan, where it flows through the 'Tiger-Leap Gorge' near Lijiang.

Iaci (Yachi) is Yachi. This was originally the name of a stronghold of the Wu Man. It stood on the shore of the Dian Chi lake close to modern Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan. Later, the name seems to have been applied to Kunming itself. The Naxi people were reported during the mid-twentieth century to refer to Kunming as 'Yichi' (Rock 1947: 14). There are numerous references to Yachi in the Yuan dynastic history. The essential one is in the biography of Uriangkhadai (appended to that of his father Sübötei). Here it is said that Yachi stood on the shore of the Dian Chi, surrounded on three sides by water. It is also stated that the Mongols attacked the north gate of Yachi, so that it would seem that the sides on which there was water were east, south and west (YS: liezhuan 8, 1882). This would place Yachi on the northern shore of the Dian Chi and not far from Kunming. The name appears written in varying ways in Chinese, using different characters, so it is clearly of non-Chinese origin.

In 1273, Sa'id Ajall Shams al-Din (Saidianchi) was appointed governor of Yunnan, 'to control the Karajang, Yachi, Chike, Jin Chi and Chahanjang barbarians' (YS: benji 8, 94). The following year, one thousand soldiers from Xiangyang were stationed at Yachi (YS: benji 8, 96). There is also a mention of Yachi in an inscription on stone, dating from 1316, at the Qiongzhu Temple outside Kunming (Rock 1947: 14; Yunnan Ribao Bianji Bu (ed.) 1980: 312). The name was clearly in common usage during the Mongol period. The Dian Chi, close to modern Kunming, is of course the lake which Marco mentions, 'some 100 miles in circumference' (MP/Latham:



Figure 7.2 A view of part of the Dian Chi lake near Kunming in Yunnan, the great lake in Caragian mentioned by Marco.

178; MP/Hambis: 300). It is the largest lake in the province, about 312 square kilometres (120 square miles) in surface area (Yunnan Ribao Bianji Bu (ed.) 1980: 4). Marco's figure for the circumference is probably an over-estimate, though not wildly so.

Caragian (city) is Dali. This was the capital of Nanzhao and the succeeding Dali Kingdom. 'Dali' may well derive from the Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic) word for a lake (cf. 'Tonle' in modern Cambodian). The Bai were among the principal inhabitants of Nanzhao and are still heavily concentrated in and near Dali. Their language is of uncertain affinity, but might be Mon-Khmer, or at least have been strongly influenced by a Mon-Khmer language (Pulleyblank 1983: 435). There were also many Yi or Wu Man in the Kingdom of Dali. The town of Dali fell to the Mongols, under Khubilai, early in 1254. They did not take captive the King of Dali, Duan Xingzhi, until later that year, when Kunming fell. He was not killed, but given a post in the administration of Yunnan (Li Kunsheng 1981: 44). The Duan family continued to be local officials until the early Ming dynasty (Rock 1947: 9). It must be noted that, today, the city formerly called Xiaguan has become Dali Municipality, though old Dali still exists, a short distance further north, and still also bears the name Dali.

Çardandan (Zardandan, Kardandan) means 'Gold teeth' in Persian. The Chinese is Jin Chi. This name appears frequently in the official history of the Yuan dynasty. One example has already been cited above. In 1273, the Jin Chi Kingdom was divided into two lu (YS: benji 8, 93). A local history of Yunnan locates the Jin Chi 'barbarians' in the vicinity of present-day Baoshan in western Yunnan. It also explains that they were called Jin Chi because it was their custom to cover two of their front teeth with gold. This custom has persisted (Rock 1947: 42). The Jin Chi are identified with the modern Dai people of Yunnan (You Zhong 1980: 386). Many Dai today still have gold front teeth. In Chinese records, it is quite common for the names of peoples to be used for the areas they inhabited, in the way that Marco uses them here.

Uncian (Vochang, Vochan, Vociam) is Yongchang, now Baoshan. The original native name was probably something like 'Wunchang'. It may well be related to that of the people called Achang, earlier also known as Echang, who still live in the area. The name 'Yongchang' appeared as early as the first century, applied to an administrative district with its seat north-east of modern Baoshan. Under the Nanzhao kingdom, during the eighth century, it became a fu with its seat at Baoshan (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 77). Baoshan is roughly south-west of Dali, between the Lancang Jiang (upper Mekong River) and the Nu Jiang (upper Salween River).

Mien is Myanmar or Burma. Mien (or Mian, in Pinyin) was the usual Chinese name for this country. The city of Mien would be Pagan, which was the capital of the Kingdom of Mien until it fell to the Mongols. It was

famous for its many Buddhist pagodas. Its ruins, further damaged by an earthquake in 1975, lie south-west of the modern town of Myingyan (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 425). A large area of what is now northern Myanmar, up to the border with India, was part of the Kingdom of Dali (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 53). This was included in Yunnan under the Yuan dynasty. South of it lay Mien. Mongol relations with Mien were bad from the beginning. In 1272 the Burmese attacked Çardandan. The next year, Mongol envoys were killed by the Burmese. They invaded the borders of Yunnan in 1277, but were heavily defeated in battle with the Mongols. This is certainly the battle near Baoshan that Marco describes (MP/Latham: 184–7; MP/Hambis: 310–14). The Burmese retreated and the Mongols followed up their victory by advancing into Myanmar as far as Kaung Sin or Jiangtou, before withdrawing. Kaung Sin was 'the Burmese stronghold commanding the defile of Bhamo' (MP/Yule-Cordier: iii, 87). It was situated on the Irrawaddy River just south of the border with the Gold Teeth area of Yunnan (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 53). The main Mongol invasion of Myanmar, also referred to by Marco, took place in 1283. The Burmese were defeated in that year and the Mongols occupied Kaung Sin. They advanced further during the next year. The Burmese king then fled in fright from his capital of Pagan to the south. In 1287, the Mongols took Pagan and the Burmese submitted to them (Jian Bozan *et al.* (ed.) 1982: 497–504; YS: liezhuan 97, 2961–3). Marco must have been in Yunnan and Mien after Pagan fell to the Mongols in 1287.

It must be noted here that the account of the battle between the Mongols and the Burmese given in the official history of the Yuan dynasty seems more far-fetched than Marco's. It reports that there were only seven hundred Mongols against a Burmese army of forty to fifty thousand, with ten thousand horses and eight hundred elephants! It also states that only one Mongol was killed, in trying to catch an elephant (YS: liezhuan 97, 2961). This suggests that, if there are differences between Marco's versions of events and Chinese accounts, it is not necessarily Marco who is wrong.

Bengala (Bangala) is Bangalah, that is, Bengal. It has been suggested that Marco here confuses Bengal with southern Burma, although what he says of the country fits Bengal (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 128n, 131n). There is certainly some confusion in his narrative here, but it probably derives from the fact that he was combining information gained during at least two, or perhaps three, journeys to Yunnan and beyond. He probably never travelled directly from Bengal to 'Caugigu' and was therefore not really certain of the distance between them and of their exact geographical positions relative to each other.

Caugigu (Cangigu, Kangigu) is Jiaozhi Guo, later called Annam and more or less the same as the northern part of today's Vietnam. The first syllable of the name was formerly pronounced 'Gau' (Karlgren 1964: 300 [1166a]). In 1257, the Mongols invaded Jiaozhi Guo and sacked the capital (PYB: 59;

Jian Bozan *et al.* (eds) 1982: 490). The next year, Annam came to terms with the Mongols. In 1261, the Mongols sent an envoy to confer the title of 'King of Annam' on the ruling monarch. In 1274, Chinese refugees from the Southern Song fled in 30 boats to Annam. In 1278, the Mongols asked the Annamese to send a tribute mission, but they refused. When the Song dynasty was finally extinguished in 1279, refugees again arrived in Annam. Fighting between the Mongols and Annamese occurred in 1284 and again in 1285, which the Annamese at first lost. Then in 1285 the Mongols suffered a defeat. Warfare continued on and off for several more years (Jian Bozan *et al.* (eds) 1982: 490–505; YS: liezhuan 96, 2951–8). In 1281, the Annamese ruler died and his son took the throne without asking for Yuan approval. The Mongols thereupon refused to recognize him as king and tried to place their own appointee on the throne (YS: liezhuan 96, 2950). Probably they occupied and controlled a part of the territory of Annam and it was this area that Marco referred to as Caugigu. As it was at war with the rest of Annam, this would explain this Jiaozhi Guo being isolated from the sea, as Marco states (MP/Marsden: 262; MP/Latham: 190; MP/Hambis: 319).

Amu (Anin, Aniu) very probably refers to the land of the Hani people, also called 'Heni', 'Woni', 'Aini' and 'Ani' (Yan Ruxian 1982: 1; You Zhong 1980: 341), and not to Annam, as has sometimes been suggested (MP/Hambis: 20n; MP/Yule-Cordier ii, 120n). The Heni are mentioned in the official history of the Yuan dynasty, where it is recorded that at least some of them were brought to submission in 1278 (YS: benji 10, 129). They were then incorporated into the army (YS: zhi 46, 1684). Some must have submitted earlier, as the Abo wanhufu was established by the Mongols in 1257 in the area of today's Honghe and Wenshan prefectures in south-west Yunnan, under the governance of a Hani leader (Yan Ruxian 1982: 2; YS: zhi 13, 973). This area was immediately north of Annam. In 1271, the wanhufu became a lu which, from 1276, was called the Lin'an lu (YS: zhi 13, 972). This latter name presumably was derived from the proximity of the lu to Annam: 'lin' means 'neighbouring' and 'an' is no doubt an abbreviation of 'Annam'. Marco's itinerary here thus makes good sense, passing from Annam directly into the country of the Heni.

Toloman (Tholoman, Coloman) is the land of the Tuliaoman, Tulaoman or Tulaman. They lived in what is now eastern Yunnan, along the border with western Guizhou, to as far north as southern Sichuan (You Zhong 1980: 457–67). They are mentioned in the official history of the Yuan dynasty under the name of 'Tulaman' or 'Tulaoman'. The Tulaman were clearly turbulent. They were reported to have stolen horses in the night from Mongol troops and, in 1279, to have killed an ambassador. On both occasions, punitive action was taken against them (YS: liezhuan 8, 1883; benji 10, 135). In 1284, the government of Yunnan province reported that some of the Tulaoman had risen in revolt. A thousand soldiers were sent to suppress them (YS: benji 13, 178).

Cuigiu (Kuiju) is Kuizhou. It cannot possibly be Guizhou province, as has sometimes been suggested, as no province with that name existed before the Ming dynasty. Kuizhou was first established at the beginning of the Tang dynasty, in 619. Its seat of government was at Fengjie (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 303). This town is in the extreme east of the area that is now Chongqing Municipality. This was included within Sichuan province until 1997, when Chongqing was made a Municipality of status equivalent to that of a province. Under the Song dynasty, Kuizhou became a lu, controlling an area from the neighbourhood of Fengjie upstream along the Yangtze to the vicinity of modern Chongqing and southwards across much of what is now Guizhou province (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 46; JYZ: 363–74). The river which Marco travelled along at this point in his journey must be the Wu Jiang, sometimes called the Qian Jiang. This river, with its tributaries, flows across most of Guizhou province, roughly from west to east. It finally turns northwards to join the Yangtze River in Chongqing Municipality. It was reported that, in the early twentieth century, this was the only major navigable river to join the Yangtze between Yichang, in Hubei province, and Chongqing (Wilson 1913: i, 6–7). Marco refers to boats on the river and, in some versions of the text, to the transport of considerable amounts of merchandise along it (MP/Latham: 192; MP/Hambis: 322). Some, though not all, versions of the text say that the journey here was upstream. It must, of course, have been downstream as far as the city next mentioned below.

Cuigiu (city) (Fungul, Funilgul, Sinulgu, Similgu, Chintigui) is Fuling, which still bears the same name. During the Song dynasty it was the seat of a zhou, called Fuzhou, and also of a xian, called Fulingxian (JYZ: 370). Fuling stands at the junction of the Wu Jiang with the Yangtze. There is considerable difference between various versions of the text of Marco's book here. It clearly became badly corrupted at a very early stage. Some variants repeat a version of the name Cuigiu for the town, while others give a quite different name. I have taken 'Fungul' and 'Funilgul' to be the forms closest to Marco's intention. There is often confusion in Chinese dialects between 'l' and 'n', so that 'Fuling' might be pronounced 'Funing'. One or other of these forms of the name must surely be the original of Fungul. From Fuling, it is, of course, possible to travel back up the Yangtze and the Min Rivers to Chengdu (Sindufu). From this point, the journey would be all upstream. In the past, the Min was usually considered the main upper stream of the Yangtze. The 'Da Jiang' ('Great River', that is, the Yangtze) was said during the Song dynasty to flow through Chengdu (JYZ: 308). The Chinese did not think of the Yangtze above its confluence with the Min as the main stream of the river, because it was not navigable for very far, whereas the Min was navigable for a much greater distance, to Chengdu and even beyond (Wilson 1913: i, 6, 9).

From all of the above, it can be seen that this itinerary of Marco's can be followed in its entirety with very little difficulty. The only serious problem is the error in locating Hezhong on the wrong side of the Yellow River, but this may well be due to corruption of the original text. Every place he mentions can be identified with certainty or near certainty. There is some confusion regarding the comparative locations of Bengala and Caugigu, but this could be because he never actually travelled directly from one to the other. It is not impossible that the information about Bengala may have been derived from hearsay, for Marco does not actually state that he himself went there. It is not clear, either, exactly how Marco got from Mien to Caugigu. Otherwise, the routes all make sense, following a perfectly logical sequence. There does not, therefore, seem to be any good reason to doubt that he personally travelled over all, or at least virtually all, of this itinerary. It is probable that he made his earliest visit to Yunnan at some time between about 1276 and 1280, on his first mission for Khubilai Khan. At that period, it is very unlikely that he went beyond the borders of Yunnan province. He probably did not enter Mien, as it had not yet been conquered and was hostile to the Mongols. His visit to that country must have been made after the fall of most of it to the Khan's armies in 1287. His route into Mien would have been from the Çardandan region, first travelling westwards from Uncian (Yongchang, Baoshan). He tells of a long descent on leaving Çardandan (MP/Latham: 187; MP/Hambis: 315). It is likely that from Uncian he took a route passing through or near Tengchong. There would indeed be a very long journey from there, all downhill, to the valley of the Irrawaddy. Tengchong was already an important town in the Kingdoms of Nanzhao and Dali, when it was a fu (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 274). It must have been either at the same time, or during a third journey to Yunnan, that Marco travelled to Annam (Caugigu). His visit almost certainly took place after 1284, while there was continuing warfare between the Mongols and the Annamese. He mentions no towns in Caugigu. Presumably this was because he was unable to visit any major Annamese settlements, as they were not held by the Mongols. From Annam, he returned to Chengdu via the lands of the Heni and Tulaman, Kuizhou and Fuling. This route took him from Annam northwards into south-east Yunnan, then north again to north-east Yunnan. From there he turned eastwards to enter modern Guizhou province and follow the Wu Jiang to the Yangtze. The final section of the journey was along the Yangtze and Min Rivers to Chengdu. Although Marco makes little of the difficulties of these journeys, they must have often been quite arduous and even dangerous, through recently conquered regions that were not always fully pacified.

8 Marco's journeys in China, part 3 – Giogiu to Çaiton

Marco must have made this journey (MP/Latham: 194–239; MP/Hambis: 324–87) when he left China with his father and uncle, departing from Khanbalikh in 1291 or early in 1292. However, in Ramusio's version of the text, he says that he visited Quinsai (modern Hangzhou) several times (MP/Latham: 213n; MP/Hambis: 356). He also deviates from the itinerary to describe a number of places a short distance off the direct line of travel. It therefore seems very likely that he made this journey more than once, at least as far as Hangzhou. These visits to Hangzhou must all have been made after it fell to the Mongols in 1276. He does not bother starting the narrative of this journey from Khanbalikh, as this would have been repetitive, but begins at the major road junction at Zhuozhou. It seems probable that, as he describes it, the journey was partly by land and partly by the Grand Canal. As noted in Chapter 5 above, much of the northern part of the Canal was only completed in 1288. Marco may well have passed this way before all of it was functional. The last section of the itinerary, from Hangzhou to Fuzhou and Çaiton, is noticeably harder to follow than most of the rest of it, further north. This may be because Marco travelled over it only once, when leaving China, and was therefore less familiar with the route. Nevertheless, it is perfectly possible to make at least near-certain identifications of almost all of the places that Marco mentions.

Giogiu (Gouza, Giogu, Gioguy, Geogui, Gingui) is Zhuozhou, already discussed in Chapter 7.

Cacanfu (Pazanfu, Caucasu) is Hejianfu, now just Hejian. Hejian was not on the Yuan dynasty Grand Canal, but was on a river which communicated with the Canal system. It became Hejianfu in 1108, under the Northern Song dynasty, and the seat of a lu under the Mongols, in 1265 (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 162).

Cianglu (Changlu) is Changlu, now Cangzhou. This town stood on the Grand Canal. Changlu had been a xian as early as 580 (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 41), but under the Northern Song dynasty it was no more than a zhen, a town of less than xian status (JYZ: 65). It must have been of some



Figure 8.1 The production of salt in salt-pans, as depicted in the official Song pharmacopoeia, printed in 1249 (ZHBC).

importance, however, for it became the regional administrative centre for the salt industry, which was a government monopoly. From early in the Ming dynasty, this department of the government salt administration took its name from the town, becoming the Changlu Salt District (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 42).

Ciangli (Chinangli) is Jiangling, now Dezhou in Shandong province. It was a xian under the Northern Song dynasty (JYZ: 73). In 1253, under the Mongols, it became Lingzhou, but its status changed from that of a zhou to that of a xian, and back again, more than once. In 1265, for example, it was reduced to a xian, though soon made a zhou once more. Amid these changes, it must have continued commonly to be called Jiangling. It was on the Grand Canal.

Tundinfu (Tudinfu, Tadinfu, Tandinfu, Candinfu) is Dongpingfu, now Dongping in Shandong province. Dongping was a jun under the Northern Song dynasty (JYZ: 19). It became a fu in 1119 (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 57). It stood a short distance away from the Grand Canal. Some commentators have tried to identify this place with Ji'nan in Shandong, because Marco tells the story of Li Tan's rebellion at this point (MP/Latham: 195n; MP/Marsden: 269n; MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 137n). There is, however, no reason to associate Li Tan particularly with Ji'nan, except that he made

his last stand there. He began his rebellion at Yidu. The story of the rebellion goes with the area, not with any one town. Despite what has been said by one critic (Wood 1995: 56–7), Marco's account of this rebellion is generally accurate. It is wrongly dated by ten years, but this may well be the result of a copyist's error. Working with roman numerals, such mistakes were easily made. The difference between mcclxxii and mcclxii is much less obvious than that between 1272 and 1262. Otherwise, the only slight problem is to identify the Mongatai who is said to have been ordered, with Ajul, to suppress the rebellion (MP/Latham: 196; MP/Hambis: 328). Ajul certainly was involved (YS: benji 5, 49; liezhuan 93, 2919). Mongatai is most probably Nanggiadai (Nangjiadai), a Naiman who, according to his biography in the official history of the Yuan dynasty, was involved in defeating the rebellion of Li Tan (YS: liezhuan 18, 2018). There may, however, also have been a Mangghudai (Mangwudai) who took part in the campaign. It is recorded that, early in 1263, a Mangghudai was appointed successor to his father, who had been darughachi of Lingzhou (Jiangling), but had died fighting at Ji'nan (YS: benji 5, 55). Presumably this had occurred the previous year, when Li Tan was besieged in Ji'nan. Mangghudai may well have fought there, too, just as Ajul had distinguished himself earlier fighting in Yunnan with his father, Uriangkhadai (YS: liezhuan 8, 1882). This Mangghudai, however, was much less prominent in the Yuan empire than Nanggiadai and cannot have played a very important part in the fighting against Li Tan.

Much of the credit for the suppression of Li Tan's revolt has been ascribed by one of Marco's critics to Shi Tianze (Wood 1995: 57). It is certainly true that Shi was involved in the campaign. He was, however, a veteran more than 60 years old at the time of the rebellion. He died in 1275 at the age of about 73. It is clear from his biography in the official history of the Yuan dynasty that he did not reach the scene of fighting until after Li Tan had taken refuge within the walls of Ji'nan (YS: liezhuan 42, 2280–1). He therefore did not participate in the earlier battle which forced Li Tan into this withdrawal and cannot be credited with the principal role in his defeat.

Singiu Matu (Singuimatu, Sinju Matu) is, probably, Xinzhou matou. There are some difficulties with the identification of the name, but the town is certainly modern Jining in Shandong province. What must be the same place is called Sunzumatu by Odoric (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 139n). A Xinzhou seems definitely to have existed somewhere in this area in 1276 (Pelliot 1959–63: ii, 834–5). It cannot have had any official status under this name, as it appears neither in the geographical sections of the official histories of the Jin and Yuan dynasties nor in major Song dynasty sources. Xinzhou matou can be identified with modern Jining by the description of the division of the river here (MP/Latham: 199; MP/Hambis: 332). There was nowhere else on the Canal system that could have been thus described. The name 'Xinzhou', meaning 'New zhou', is probably to be explained by the fact that the zhou governing this area, called Jizhou, originally had its seat at the

nearby town of Juye. Later, it was transferred to Rencheng, today's Jining. Juye must have become known as Jizhou, so that when Rencheng became properly entitled to that name, it had to be called the 'New' zhou. There was a Jizhou as early as 423, but well north of its later location. In its subsequent position, it first came into being in 952, with its seat at Juye. In 1150, under the Jin dynasty, the seat of the zhou was, for the first time, transferred to Rencheng (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 203; JS: zhi 6, 387). The Mongols made many changes to the status of the administrative units in the area and switched the centre of administration backwards and forwards between Rencheng and Juye. The official history of the Yuan dynasty says:

> In 1269, the seat of administration of Jizhou was returned to Juye . . . In 1271, it was raised in status to become Jiningfu, administered from Rencheng, but after a short time the seat of administration was moved back to Juye. In 1275, Jizhou was re-established, administered from Rencheng and subordinate to Jiningfu. In 1278, the fu was moved to Jizhou [i.e. Rencheng], but Juye handled the affairs of Jizhou. In the same year, the administration of the fu was again returned to Juye, while Jizhou was administered from Rencheng, as it had formerly been . . . In 1279, Jining was raised to the status of a lu.
>
> (YS: zhi 10, 901)

Amid all these changes, it must have been difficult to keep track of which town was properly entitled to the name Jizhou at any particular time. One reason for the many changes was that there was frequent flooding in this region. This was because of the change of course of the Yellow River after 1128 and the fact that, along its new course, there were no proper dykes to control it when it was in spate. The first move of Jizhou from Juye to Rencheng, in 1150, occurred because Juye was washed away by flooding of the River (YS: zhi 10, 901). It was rebuilt later on a slightly different site (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 203). Rencheng (modern Jining) became important because of its strategic position on the waterways (YS: zhi 10, 901). The canal known as the Jizhou River, an essential part of the Grand Canal system, was completed in 1283 (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 104). Water from the Wen and Si Rivers was channelled to Rencheng, where it was divided in the way that Marco describes. Some of it was made to flow back into the main channel of the Si and thence to the Huai, while some flowed in the opposite direction to the Daqing River (see Chapter 5).

Lingiu (Lingui, Lingiu, Linju), which Odoric calls Lenzin or Lencyn (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 242; MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 141n), is Liucheng. Confusion between 'n' and 'u' is common in medieval manuscripts. 'Lingiu' should no doubt be 'Liugin', and 'Lenzin', 'Leuzin'. There was a place called Liucheng on the north-east side of the Grand Canal, a short distance north of Xuzhou. A xian, called Liuxian, existed in this area under the Qin, Han and Sui dynasties



Figure 8.2 The Iron Pagoda in Jining in Shandong province. Seven of its nine storeys were cast in 1105, during the Northern Song dynasty. It was completed in 1581. The bell tower to its left dates from 1353 but was repaired in 1460.



Figure 8.3 Part of Liu Tianhe's map of the Yellow River of 1535, showing the position of Liucheng. The narrow channels of the 'New River', which apparently isolate Liucheng on an island, were not dug until the 1500s. The Grand Canal is the broad channel running between Liucheng and Xuzhou.
Key: (a) Liucheng; (b) Xuzhou; (c) Pizhou; (d) Suqianxian.

(Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 219). Liucheng is clearly shown on a map of the Yellow River drawn by Liu Tianhe during the Ming dynasty, in 1535 (Chen Binyin (ed.) 1982: 58). It is one of only very few settlements of less than zhou or xian status included on this map. The existence of the town is also recorded during the Song dynasty (JYZ: 18). As there was such a town here during both the Song and Ming dynasties, it must be very likely that it existed during the Yuan dynasty, too. Although not even of xian status, it would have become important because of its position on the Grand Canal of the Yuan dynasty, at the junction of the canalized Si River with the Yellow River (or at least with one of its channels). It is likely that transhipment took place here from larger vessels, which could navigate the

waters of the more southerly stretches of the Canal and the Huai River, to smaller vessels, suitable for the Jizhou River in Shandong, where water supply was often inadequate. Marco remarks that there were bigger ships at this place (MP/Latham: 200; MP/Hambis: 333). This transhipment would have required a large labour force and therefore a large settlement. Liucheng would have lost its importance when the route of the Canal was changed during the late Ming dynasty. It seems no longer to exist today, but all trace of it may have been obliterated by flooding of the Yellow River. The much more important town of Xuzhou was perhaps not sufficiently close to the Grand Canal at this period to act as a port. There is no doubt, however, that Marco confuses Liucheng and Xuzhou when he says that Lingiu is 'the capital of the kingdom' (MP/Latham: 200; MP/Hambis: 333). Odoric says that Lenzin stood upon the Yellow River (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 242). Marco does not mention the Yellow River at this point, but later. This may well be because the main branch of the Yellow River did not flow here in his time (see Chapter 5).

Pingiu (Pingui, Piju) is Pizhou, now Gupi, in the north of modern Jiangsu province. It stood on the northern side of the Yuan dynasty Grand Canal. It is not the same as modern Pixian, which lies further north, on the Grand Canal of the late Ming and Qing dynasties. Pizhou was sited at Gupi until the town was badly damaged by an earthquake in 1668 (Ding Li *et al.* (eds) 1990: 205).

Ciugiu (Cingui, Siju) is Suqian, still so called today. It was a xian during the Song dynasty (JYZ: 16).

Caramoran (Karamoran) is the Yellow River. Kara Mörön is the usual Mongolian name for the River, meaning 'Black River'. The changes of course of the River at this period have been discussed in Chapter 5. The Huai River, with which the Yellow River united at this time, formed the boundary between the Song and Jin empires for more or less its entire length. Further west, the boundary turned somewhat northwards and followed the Qinling mountains (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 49–50).

Coigangiu (Koiganzu) is Huai'anzhou, now Huai'an. The second syllable, 'an', would have been pronounced 'ngan' in Marco's day. The initial 'ng' was only dropped very recently in standard Chinese pronunciation and is still heard in some dialects. Huai'an was a zhou under the Song dynasty, but became a lu from 1283, under Khubilai Khan (YS: zhi 11, 931). The coast at this period was much closer to Huai'an than it is today. There has been a great deal of deposition of silt since then (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 60).

Caguy (Kuanzu, Quanzu, Caigui, Caicui, Kaiju) is very probably Huaiyin. It is evident that medieval copyists often tended to make the endings of the various place-names in the book conform to a pattern, thus corrupting the original spellings. This town stood forty li west of Huai'an during the Song

dynasty (JYZ: 195). It was not a zhou, but only a xian. It was not on the other side of the Yellow River from Huai'an, but faced it across the Grand Canal (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 121). In fact, it is not really clear from Marco's account that he meant to say that the two cities were separated by the Yellow River. His meaning may have been that they were on opposite sides of the Canal (MP/Latham: 201; MP/Hambis: 335). The relative positions of modern Huai'an and Huaiyin are very different from what they were in Marco's time.

Mangi (Manzi, Manji) is Manzi. This is a pejorative term for people from south China (Needham 1954: 169). It originally meant 'southern barbarians'. At a much later date, in about 1900, it was applied to Chinese immigrants into Manchuria (Putnam Weale 1904: ix). It is used by Marco to mean the area of China that had formed the empire of the Southern Song dynasty. Presumably this was current usage among the Mongols and their non-Chinese and north Chinese subjects at the period.

Paughin (Paukin) is Baoying in modern Jiangsu province, which still bears the same name. It was one of the major towns on the Canal between the Huai and Yangtze Rivers, although it had only the status of a xian. It was elevated to become a fu for just four years, from 1279 to 1283 (YS: zhi 11, 932).

Cauyu (Kain) is Gaoyou, still so called. It became a fu during the reign of Khubilai Khan, in 1277 (YS: zhi 11, 932). It stood on the Grand Canal. All the places that Marco mentions at this point in his narrative were major towns on the system of canals in this area.

Tigiu (Tingui) is Taizhou. It was recorded during the Song dynasty that the sea was 107 li east of the town (JYZ: 196). It was not on the Grand Canal, but stood on the Yunyan He which connected with the Canal (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 287).

Cingiu (Chingui, Chinju) is probably Tongzhou, now Nantong in the south-east of modern Jiangsu province, close to the northern shore of the Yangtze estuary. It was also on the Yunyan He. During the Song dynasty, it was said to be 195 li south-eastwards from the town of Taizhou to the boundary of the zhou and then a further 60 li to Tongzhou. From there, it was 80 li east to the sea (JYZ: 196, 199). These indications fit reasonably well with what Marco says about the location of Cingiu (MP/Latham: 205; MP/Hambis: 343). Again, the coastline has altered considerably here since Marco's day, with very considerable deposition of silt and extension of the land (Guo Moruo (ed.) 1990: 48).

Yangiu (Yangui) is Yangzhou, which, from 1277, was the administrative centre of a lu (YS: zhi 11, 929). This was a very important city on the Grand Canal close to where it reached the Yangtze River. It was indeed the seat of government of one of the twelve Yuan provinces, as Marco says (MP/Latham: 206; MP/Hambis: 343). The province was created in 1276, after the area

between Yangzhou and Hangzhou was conquered by the Mongols. The provincial administration was moved to Hangzhou for about a year in 1284–5, but then returned to Yangzhou. Later, the provinces were reorganized and the administration was moved to Kaifeng (YS: zhi 11, 929). The claim that Marco personally governed Yangzhou for three years does not occur in all versions of the book, nor even in all those that are usually considered the 'best' versions, such as the Toledo manuscript (Jackson 1998: 99–100). It has also been pointed out, by one of Marco's harshest critics, that one manuscript says that Marco 'sejourna' in Yangzhou, rather than 'governa' or 'seigneura' there (Wood 1995: 133). In fact, at least two manuscripts have this reading, though it seems likely that one is a copy of the other. They are considered 'good' versions of the text, often containing superior readings (MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 94; ii,157n). This issue should therefore be set aside now.

Namghin (Naingui) is Anqing. The name would have been pronounced something like 'Nganking' at this period. It was the seat of a lu under the Yuan. It has sometimes been suggested that this place should be identified with modern Nanjing, but this is impossible as that city was not so called until the Ming dynasty. Under the Song dynasty, Anqing was a fu. In 1277, under the Yuan dynasty, it became a lu (YS: zhi 11, 929).

Saianfu (Sayanfu) is Xiangyangfu. It is of course no longer a fu, and is today included in the conurbation of Xiangfan, in Hubei province. The Mongols, led by the general Ajul, attacked Xiangyang in 1267 and carried off 50,000 of its inhabitants and 5,000 horses. A Song army sent against him was defeated. The siege of the city and of the neighbouring town of Fancheng began the next year (YS: benji 6, 71, 73). It lasted until the spring of 1273. After Fancheng was taken, the Song general in Xiangyang finally surrendered (YS: benji 8, 93; zhi 11, 926). Under Mongol rule, Xiangyang was at first a fu, as it had been under the Song dynasty. It was raised to the status of a lu in 1274.

The story of the Polos having mangonels or trebuchets made to force the surrender of Xiangyang cannot be absolutely true. The surrender of Xiangyang occurred before Marco arrived in China. However, it may be that there is some truth in it. Not all versions of the text claim any involvement by Marco. According to most versions of the story, the Polos said that 'we have with us in our retinue', or something similar, people with the knowledge to make these engines (MP/Latham: 207; MP/Hambis: 346). Perhaps the two elder Polos had merely travelled, during their first visit to China, with some of those who made these machines and Rustichello embroidered the story from that. It is certainly true that Xiangyang held out against the Mongols for a very long time (actually longer than Marco states) and that, by the time it fell, the Song dynasty was on the point of collapse. Marco's story is therefore not a complete fabrication. It must be noted, too, that several versions of the text omit all mention of this claim (Olschki 1960: 344; Jackson 1998: 99–100).

Singiu (Singui) is almost certainly Zhenzhou, now Yizheng in modern Jiangsu province, close to the north bank of the Yangtze River. It stood 60 li from Yangzhou, according to a Song dynasty record (JYZ: 198). It was made a lu under the Yuan dynasty, during the period from 1277 until 1284, but was then again reduced to the status of a zhou. It was a major port on the Yangtze River, where one of the channels of the Grand Canal joined the River (Yao Hanyuan 1997: 121).

Quian (Kian) is Jiang, formerly pronounced Kiang and usually called the Yangtze River in English. It is generally called the Chang Jiang (Long River) in Chinese, but even today is not uncommonly simply called the 'Jiang'.

Caigiu (Kayngui) is Guazhou. Marco's description of the Grand Canal at this point is very accurate (see Chapter 5 above). The modern town of Guazhou is not on the same site as the Yuan period town, for the River has moved here (Wang Xucheng and Wang Tinghuai 1982: 159). The town was not very important under the Song dynasty and was of less than xian status (JYZ: 192). The rocky island which Marco mentions, opposite Guazhou in the middle of the River (MP/Latham: 210; MP/Hambis: 351) is Jin Shan, which is no longer an island. The channel between it and the south bank of the River silted up during the 1870s. Today the south bank of the River is some three kilometres (two miles) north of the former island (Shan Shumo 1982: 139; Wang Xucheng and Wang Tinghuai 1982: 160). Guazhou stood at the point where the second channel of the Grand Canal reached the River. Like Zhenzhou, it was a major port on the Yangtze River and Grand Canal waterway systems.

Cinghianfu (Chinghianfu, Changhianfu) is Zhenjiangfu, which is still called Zhenjiang, though no longer a fu. It was originally given the name Zhenjiang in 1113, during the Northern Song dynasty, when it was first raised to fu status. Under the Mongols, in 1276, it became a lu (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 288–9; YS: zhi 14, 982). The most southerly section of the Grand Canal, from Hangzhou to the Yangtze, joined the River at Zhenjiang.

Ciangiu (Chinginju, Tinguigui) is Changzhou, still so called. The massacre at Changzhou, of which Marco speaks, is mentioned in the official history of the Song dynasty and also in the biography of the Mongol general Bayan in the official history of the Yuan dynasty. It took place late in 1275 or at the beginning of 1276 (SS, benji 47, 645; YS: liezhuan 14, 1964). The massacre seems to have been provoked by the fact that the Song commander at Changzhou fled at the approach of the Yuan armies and wanted to surrender the town, but other Song commanders took control of Changzhou and held out against the Mongols for several months. Bayan was angered by the reversal of the initial submission (YS: liezhuan 14, 1964). Changzhou stood on the Canal, which Marco here continues to follow.

Sugiu (Singui) is Suzhou, also on the Canal. What Marco says here about 'earth' and 'heaven' is not accurate, though it clearly refers to a popular

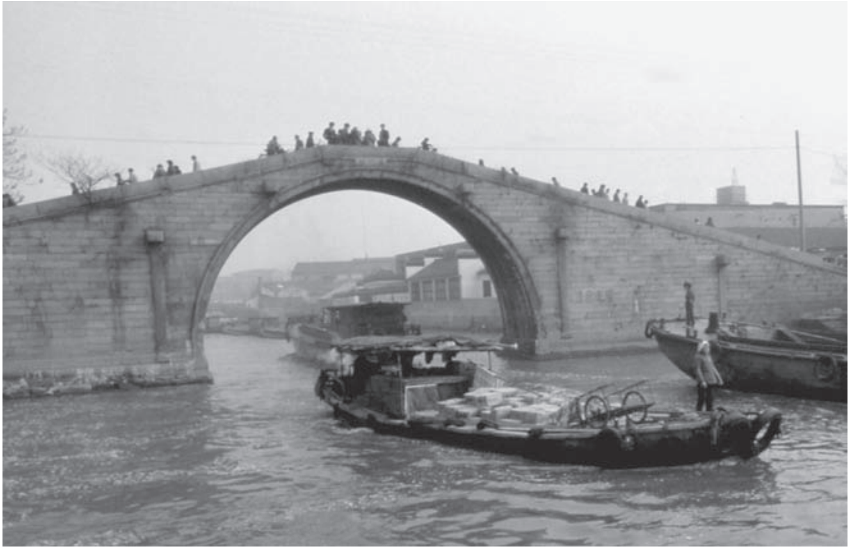


Figure 8.4 An old stone bridge with a high arch at Suzhou.

Chinese saying. In more or less its modern form, this began to circulate only during the Northern Song dynasty (Liao Zhihao *et al.* 1980: 47). It is possible that Marco may have heard a somewhat different version of this saying from that current today. The productivity of the land around Suzhou was also proverbial, so that it was, in a sense, closely associated with the earth (Liao Zhihao *et al.* 1980: 48). Marco mentions the many stone bridges here, large enough for 'one or two galleys' to pass beneath them (MP/Latham: 212; MP/Hambis: 354).

There are problems with identifying the next three places, which Marco does not describe very fully:

Vugiu (Vagiu) is probably not Huzhou, as has sometimes been suggested in the past (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 184n). A more likely candidate is Wujiang. This town was only 40 li, by Song dynasty measure, south of Suzhou, on the Grand Canal (JYZ: 210). It was certainly closer than Huzhou and could easily have been reached from Suzhou in one day. It was a xian under the Song and early Yuan dynasties, but was raised in status to a zhou in 1295 (YS: zhi 14, 982).

Vughin is probably Wuxing, an alternative name for Huzhou (JYZ: 211). The town was first called Wuxing as early as 266. It also bore the name during part of the Tang dynasty (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 122). During the later Song dynasty, it became Anjizhou and was subsequently Huzhoulu under the Mongols (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 263). The old name of Wuxing was officially applied to the town from time to

time later (Ding Li *et al.* (eds) 1990: 440), so it may well have continued in common usage.

Ciangan (Changan) is very probably Changxing. This town is a short distance, 70 li by Song dynasty measure, north-west of Huzhou (JYZ: 212). It only had xian status, but was nevertheless an important town. Indeed, it became a zhou in 1295, shortly after Marco left China (YS: zhi 14, 981).

These three places, plus Suzhou, all were (and still are) major towns or cities around the Tai Hu lake. It probably would be about three days' journey from Changxing back through Huzhou and then to Hangzhou, as stated in most versions of the text (MP/Latham: 213; MP/Hambis: 355).

Quinsai (Kinsai, Kinsay) is Xingzai, that is, Hangzhou. It is called 'Xingzaisuo' in the official history of the Song dynasty (SS: zhi 38, 1315). 'Suo' merely means 'place' and was no doubt commonly dropped in normal parlance. Marco says that he was in Hangzhou when 'account was being rendered to the Great Khan's agents of its total revenue and population' (MP/Latham: 227; MP/Hambis: 370). It has been stated that no census was taken in Hangzhou during the period when Marco was in China (Wood 1995: 35–6). This seems strange, for the Mongols had to take censuses in all the places that they conquered, in order to be able to assess the amount of poll-tax payable. Indeed, a large-scale census of the entire Mongol empire was undertaken in the years 1252–9 and Khubilai ordered a further census in 1271 (Allsen 1983: 262). Hangzhou submitted to the Mongols in 1276, too late to be included in these censuses. However, one of the first acts of the Mongols after entering the city was 'to record the number and quantity of its soldiers, people, money and grain' (YS: liezhuan 14, 1966). A proper census surely must have been taken there shortly after it came under Mongol rule. This would, of course, have been during the time that Marco was in the Yuan empire. In fact, the geographical section of the official history of the Yuan dynasty gives population data for Hangzhou, in terms of both households (hu) and individuals (kou), and states that the figures are taken from the registers for the year 1290. Marco might well have been in Hangzhou in that year, on his way back from India (MP/Latham: 42; MP/Hambis: 62).

Gampu (Ganfu, Ganpu) is Ganpu, on the northern shore of Hangzhou Bay. It was of minor status during the Northern Song dynasty (JYZ: 220), but became much more important after the move of capital to Hangzhou, as a centre of foreign trade. During the Yuan dynasty, it remained an important port. Later, the entrance to the port silted up and the town again declined (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 285).

Tanpigiu (Tapinzu, Tanpiju, Tanpigui, Tacpiguy, Carpiguy) is difficult to identify with any certainty. The most likely place seems to be Tonglu, which was a xian during the Song and Yuan dynasties (JYZ: 219; YS: zhi 14, 983). It still bears the same name today. This town is in the right direction and roughly the right place, on the Fuchun River. Its name bears some

resemblance to the transcriptions. 'Tanp-' might derive from 'Tong' and '-igui' from 'lu', again assuming that copyists tended to make the endings of place-names conform to a pattern.

Vugiu (Vuju, Vugui, Uguiu) is certainly Wuzhou, now Jinhua in central Zhejiang province. It became a lu during the Yuan dynasty, in 1276 (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 266; YS: zhi 14, 984).

Ghiugiu (Guiguy, Ghingui, Gengui) is Quzhou. This was a zhou as early as 621, during the Tang dynasty, and became a lu in 1276 under the Mongols (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 304; YS: zhi 14, 984). It still bears the same name today. The initial 'Qu' of the name was formerly pronounced 'G'iu' (Karlgren 1964: 44 [96d]).

Cianscian (Ciancian, Chanshan, Zengian) is Suichang, not either Changshan or Jiangshan. Suichang, a xian during the Northern Song dynasty (JYZ: 217), is on or near the watershed between rivers flowing into the Qiantang and rivers flowing to the Zhejiang coast near Wenzhou. Marco's route here is not very direct, hence some of the problems of identifying it, but it was probably comparatively easy at this period. The mountainous areas of southern Zhejiang and Fujian must have been dangerous and difficult at the time. Marco's route seems to follow the Fuchun River (the upper Qiantang) up to Quzhou, then the Wuxi Jiang and one of its feeders to the watershed above Suichang. What Marco says about the division of waters here is somewhat confused, but I take it to be a description of a watershed (MP/Latham: 230; MP/Hambis: 376). It is true that, from near Suichang, waters flow either north and north-east to the Qiantang and Hangzhou Bay or south or south-east to the sea. Neither Changshan nor Jiangshan, which have been previously identified with Cianscian (MP/Hambis: 376n; MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 221–2n), stand as close to a watershed. It seems that Ramusio's version of the text, which here gives Zengian, has preserved the best variant of the name. This should no doubt read 'Zuegian', which is not very far from 'Suichang'. The first part of the name was, in fact, formerly pronounced 'Zwi' (Karlgren 1964: 142 [526d]).

Cugiu (Cuju, Cinguy, Cugui, Gieza) is Chuzhou, now Lishui in central-southern Zhejiang province. It became a zhou during the Sui dynasty, in 589, and a lu under the Yuan dynasty, in 1276 (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 72; YS: zhi 14, 986). Marco's route continues by the Songyangxi and Longquanxi rivers to Chuzhou. Then, for a short distance, it returns by the same route up the Longquanxi, but stays with this river all the way to the watershed. Beyond this, it enters the Songxi valley and so reaches Jianningfu (see below). My identifications of Ghiugiu and Cugiu are, at the very least, virtually certain. This makes the possibility that Cianscian can be other than Suichang extremely unlikely.

Choncha (Chonka, Koncha) is very probably Jiangzhe, one of the Yuan provinces. It was created in 1285, but its capital was at Hangzhou, not at

Fuzhou, as Marco says (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 103; MP/Latham: 233; MP/Hambis: 377). It did include what is now Fujian province, however, and for a time the capital of Quanzhou province was at Fuzhou (see under 'Fugiu' below). It is also the case that, at this point in the journey, Marco crosses the border of the former Song dynasty lu of Fujian (JYZ: 401) and of the former Yuan province of Quanzhou. Marco's error is perhaps excusable in view of the frequent changes of administrative divisions under the Yuan dynasty and the fact that Jiangzhe was created only very shortly before his departure from China.

Quenlinfu (Kuelinfu, Kelinfu) is Jianningfu, now Jian'ou in Fujian province (it is not the same as modern Jianning). Here is another possible case of a dialectal confusion of 'n' with 'l'. It was formerly Jianzhou (JYZ: 401), but became Jianningfu in 1162, under the Southern Song dynasty. During the Yuan dynasty, in 1289, it became a lu (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982: 170; YS: zhi 14, 989).

Vuguen (Unguen, Unken) is Houguan, now Minhou (JYZ: 400; Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982a: 195). The town is also known as Ganzhe (Ding Li *et al.* (eds) 1990: 658), which means 'sugar-cane'. This tallies well with Marco's account (MP/Latham: 232; MP/Hambis: 379).

Fugiu (Fuju, Kangiu) is Fuzhou, the provincial capital of modern Fujian and a major city since at least the eighth century. It was the seat of administration of Fujianlu under the Song dynasty (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982a: 279; JYZ: 399). It was again raised to lu status in 1278. In 1281, the provincial administration was moved here from Quanzhou, but in the following year was moved back again. Then in 1283, it was brought to Fuzhou once more and remained there until the creation of Jiangzhe province in 1285. After this, the provincial administration was based in Hangzhou (YS: zhi 14, 989).

Çaiton (Zaitun, Zayton) is now Quanzhou. The name Çaiton is not, of course, Chinese. It is derived from the Arabic name for the port, which in turn came from the avenues of trees planted around the city by an early Song governor. These trees were called Citong in Chinese (Needham 1954: 180). The Arabic version was influenced by the word for olive in that language (Ibn Battuta 1982: 323). The Citong tree is an *Erythrina* species. The name seems usually to be applied to *Erythrina indica* Lam. (synonymous with *E. variegata* L.). Quanzhou held the status of a provincial capital for a short time after 1278 (YS: zhi 14, 990).

Tingiu (Tyunju, Tingui) is Tingzhou, now Changting, close to the border between modern Fujian and Jiangxi provinces. The town which is today the seat of Changting xian is still called Tingzhou (Ding Li *et al.* (eds) 1990: 151). Tingzhou was first created in 736 and became a lu during the Yuan dynasty, in 1278 (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982a: 73; YS: zhi 14, 991). During



Figure 8.5 One of the pair of pagodas at the Kaiyuan Temple at Quanzhou, built during the Southern Song dynasty, in 1228–50.

the Northern Song dynasty, it was one of only six zhou in Fujianlu (JYZ: 399–405). Three of the others were Fuzhou, Quanzhou and Jianzhou (Jianning), all of which have already been mentioned above. It was therefore very easy to identify this town, as the available choice was so limited. The town stands on a route into neighbouring Jiangxi province. I am unable to confirm the manufacture of porcelain here. Perhaps it just passed through Tingzhou, for it is highly likely that porcelain from Jingdezhen would have been brought to Quanzhou via Tingzhou. Similar porcelain may also have been manufactured locally, at least on a small scale. Various kinds of porcelain were made by many local kilns all over China. It was common for major types of pottery from important centres of manufacture to be copied at these local centres of production (Dawson (ed.) 1964: 191–2). Perhaps Marco visited Tingzhou and saw kilns there producing ware similar to that of Jingdezhen, so that he mistakenly believed that all porcelain of that type was made there. Perhaps he never actually went to Tingzhou but was told, in Quanzhou, that that was where it came from, meaning only that it was carried through the town. It is impossible now to know.

In the whole of the above itinerary, Marco mentions more than forty placenames. Of these, there are several that are somewhat problematic, but only very few that cannot be identified with something at least very close to certainty. From time to time, Marco deviates a little from the strict route, to include information about other important places close to it. Clearly, his knowledge of much of the area through which the itinerary runs was extensive. Even when he makes mistakes, there are plausible reasons for the errors. Overall, this account of a large part of eastern China is remarkably sound. Marco recounted this journey at this point in the book because it was his route out of China. Having arrived at the great port of Quanzhou, Marco and his father and uncle took ship for Persia. They were never to return to the empire of the Great Khan. There were still many adventures ahead of them, in South-east Asia, India and the Near East, and even after they had reached the Mediterranean. It is really quite remarkable that all of them survived their experiences and fortunate indeed that Marco had his story written down.

9 Rhubarb, musk, cranes and other creatures

There is very much more in Marco's book than accounts of journeys and descriptions of cities and waterways. Most of its content has already been thoroughly discussed by previous commentators, so that it would be superfluous to cover the same ground again. There still remain areas that can usefully be re-examined, however. Marco gives a great deal of attention to natural products, to game that might be hunted, to strange creatures and to plants of economic value. Topics such as these have generally been rather poorly elucidated in the past, probably because they require specialist knowledge. Marco has even been accused of making mistakes where he was, in fact, entirely accurate. This area of Marco's account merits close examination, because it is rarely touched upon by other medieval visitors to China. They seem simply not to have been very interested in such things. This is surely information that Marco must have obtained, at least in great part, by personal observation, not at second hand.

Rhubarb

Marco correctly notes that rhubarb grows in the mountains of Tangut, that is, the Qilian Shan and other ranges on the north-eastern edge of the Tibetan plateau (MP/Latham: 90; MP/Hambis: 151). The best-quality rhubarb came from this area (Wilson 1913: ii, 38). Wild rhubarb is still common and much collected there today. He also records rhubarb growing near Suzhou in modern Jiangsu province (MP/Latham: 212; MP/Hambis: 354). This has puzzled previous commentators, who have often considered it a mistake (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 183n; Olschki 1960: 429–30; Wood 1995: 90). Here it is necessary to reflect for a moment on what Marco had in mind when he spoke of rhubarb. Certainly it was not the culinary rhubarb grown in gardens for its edible leaf-stalks. This was unknown in Europe at the period. In Britain, it first came into cultivation, from Siberia, in about 1573 (Wright and Dewar 1894: 835). It does not, however, seem to have been much used for culinary purposes until the eighteenth century. Before then, rhubarb was a medicine. It was the root that was used for this purpose, for its strong purgative or laxative properties. There are about 60 species of rhubarb, belonging to the genus *Rheum* L. They occur throughout much of temperate



Figure 9.1 Rhubarb root cut into chunks and drying in the sun in south-west Gansu province.

and sub-tropical Asia. Some of the species of more westerly distribution were known in Europe at an early date. Rhubarb was also an important herbal medicine in China from early times. Only a few species are generally valued for their medicinal qualities (Haw 2003: 220). In Chinese, rhubarb root used as medicine is called Da Huang. As with many Chinese medicines, there are alternative kinds of Da Huang, produced in different regions. Before modern times, difficulties in carrying goods over long distances could make products from far away very expensive or even unobtainable. This must have been greatly accentuated during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in China, because of the division of the country and frequent warfare. Inter-regional trade was often disrupted (Dunnell 1996: 100). The importance of local products would therefore have been greatly enhanced. The Southern Song empire, in which Suzhou was situated, was separated from the main source of Da Huang in the Tangut region by the hostile Jin empire. After Xi Xia was conquered by the Mongols, supplies of rhubarb from this area must have been more or less entirely cut off. Thus, if a local alternative was available, it would have been used much more than at other periods. The alternative kind of Da Huang from the area near Suzhou is called Tu Da Huang ('Tu' here means 'local'). It is not derived from a species of *Rheum*, but from plants of the closely-related genus, *Rumex* L. (docks). The two main species involved are *Rumex obtusifolius* L. and *Rumex chalepensis* Mill. Both grow in Jiangsu province (Wu and Raven (eds) 2003: 338–9). The roots, once dug up, cut up and dried, would look very similar to true Da Huang.

They can be used in much the same way (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1959: 35–9). The officially compiled pharmacopoeia of the Song dynasty contains a record of Tu Da Huang. Under the entry for Da Huang, it says: 'That which comes from the Jiang–Huai region is called Tu Da Huang' (ZHBC: 247). The Jiang–Huai region would, of course, include the area around Suzhou. Marco is therefore not wrong about rhubarb growing near Suzhou. It is only necessary to realize that what he meant by 'rhubarb' was Da Huang, for medicinal use. He could not have distinguished between plants of the genera *Rheum* and *Rumex*, for the concept of botanical genera, in the Linnaean sense, did not exist in his time.

It should be noted in passing that Marco is also not in error to talk of mountains in the vicinity of Suzhou, for which he has been criticized (Wood 1995: 90). There are low mountains between the town and the Tai Hu lake, such as Lingyan Shan, Tianping Shan and Qionglong Shan. On the far side of the lake are the Tianmu Shan, rising to 1,500 metres (5,000 feet) in altitude. Perhaps this is an example of Marco thinking in Chinese terms, for the word 'shan' ('mountain') is commonly applied in China to quite low hills, especially if they are rugged and rocky.

Musk Deer

Marco's description of the Musk Deer (MP/Latham: 104, 173; MP/Hambis: 177, 293) is generally accurate, except that only the two upper canine teeth are elongated and the cycle of musk production is annual, not monthly. It is only the male that has elongated canines and produces musk. Five different species of Musk Deer have been recorded from China, but probably only four should be recognized, one of them with several subspecies. They occur quite widely across China, most abundantly in forested mountainous districts in the west and north-east. The most widespread species is the Siberian Musk Deer, *Moschus moschiferus* L., with four or five subspecies in China. The Black Musk Deer, *Moschus fuscus* Li, and Himalayan Musk Deer *Moschus leucogaster* Hodgson, occur only in restricted areas, mainly in southern Tibet (the former also in north-west Yunnan). The Alpine Musk Deer, *Moschus chrysogaster* Hodgson (also known as *Moschus sifanicus*) occurs from the Helan Shan in Ningxia through mountainous areas of Gansu and Qinghai to western Sichuan, north-west Yunnan and Tibet (Sheng Helin (ed.) 1992: 45–88). The flesh of these deer is reported to be excellent eating, as Marco says (Wilson 1913: ii, 171). The trade in musk has led to very large numbers of them being killed, to the point where at least some of the species are locally endangered (TRAFFIC 2002).

Cranes at Chagan Nur

Marco records the remarkable fact that five different species of cranes occur at Chagan Nur (MP/Latham: 107; MP/Hambis: 182; MP/Marsden: 143–4).

In Europe, there is only one species of crane that has ever been at all abundant and widespread, the Common Crane, *Grus grus* (which is no longer very common). As far as I am aware, little attempt has ever been made to try to identify all the species that Marco describes. Such suggestions as have been proposed have been, for the most part, wrong (MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 297n). Yet, despite being quite obviously corrupted in most versions of the text, Marco's descriptions are good enough to enable positive identifications. This is a striking fact, for only a good and experienced observer of birds would be likely to give such useful and accurate information.

The first kind of crane, according to Marco, is entirely black, like a raven, with long wings. Some versions of the text also say that it is a very large kind, but this must be a corruption. This is the Demoiselle Crane, *Grus* (or *Anthropoides*) *virgo*. It does not really have long wings, but has long plumes on the wings, that hang over the tail when the bird is not in flight. It is not completely black, but almost entirely grey and black, and is the smallest crane occurring in China. It was probably the most common crane in the Chagan Nur area and may have bred there in the past.

The second kind is pure white and is the biggest of the five, with either (according to different versions of the text) a head that is red and black on a white ground or a red and black head and a black and white neck. This is the Japanese or Red-crowned Crane, *Grus japonensis*. There are, in fact, black, white and red on the head, but only black and white on the neck. It is indeed a very large crane, standing 1.5 metres (5 feet) tall. I am unable to explain the peacock-like markings on the wings that Marco describes. This species is unlikely to be seen regularly in the Chagan Nur area today, but, in the recent past, it bred in places in eastern Inner Mongolia, perhaps including Chagan Nur.

The third kind is said to be the same as those in Italy. This is the Common Crane, *Grus grus*, which breeds right across northern Eurasia, wintering in Africa and southern Asia. Its breeding range still includes northern Mongolia and the extreme east and north-east of Manchuria and it would pass the Chagan Nur area on migration.

The fourth is described as a small kind, with pendant feathers near the ears, of various colours in different versions of the text. The reference must be to black quills on red skin. It is also said to have red and blue or red and black plumage. This is the Hooded Crane, *Grus monacha*. It is only a little larger than the Demoiselle Crane. Much of its plumage is dark grey. The neck and nape are white and there is bare red skin on the top and sides of the head, covered with black quills. It breeds in parts of Manchuria and in Siberia, and might well still pass the Chagan Nur area on migration.

The fifth kind is large and grey all over, with a head that is either red and black, black and white, or white, red and black, according to various versions of the text. This is the White-naped or White-necked Crane, *Grus vipio*. There are red, black and white on the head. It still breeds today in parts of Manchuria and Mongolia and would migrate past the Chagan Nur area. All

these cranes must undoubtedly be much rarer today than they were in the thirteenth century, yet they might all still turn up at Chagan Nur, at least occasionally (De Schauensee 1984: 200–2; MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000: 124–6; Zhongguo Yesheng Dongwu Baohu Xiehui (ed.) 1995: 102–6). Presumably, in order to be so well acquainted with these birds, Marco must have been often at Chagan Nur when the Khan hunted them with his falcons.

Cators

Also at Chagan Nur, Marco notes that flocks of 'cators' or 'great partridges' were kept in a semi-wild condition (MP/Latham: 107; MP/Hambis: 183). It has been suggested that 'cator' was probably corrupted from 'chukor' by analogy with Latin 'coturnix' ('quail') (MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 297–8n). This may well be correct. The name 'Chukor' is onomatopoeic, however, imitative of the sound made by the bird. It must therefore be equally possible that 'cator' derives from a local, perhaps Mongolian, name that was also onomatopoeic. The 'great partridge' of southern Europe would be the Red-legged or French Partridge, *Alectoris rufa*, or the Rock Partridge, *Alectoris graeca*. These very similar birds are 'great' by comparison with the noticeably smaller Common or Grey Partridge, *Perdix perdix*. The Chukor, *Alectoris chukar*, is a third closely related and very similar species. Indeed, it is sometimes considered a subspecies of *Alectoris graeca*. It occurs from the south-east Balkans right across Asia and is widespread in northern China. It would occur in the Chagan Nur area (Heinzel *et al.* 1979: 102; De Schauensee 1984: 179; Zhongguo Yesheng Dongwu Baohu Xiehui (ed.) 1995: 78; MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000: 21).

Pheasants

Marco mentions pheasants in China a number of times in the book (MP/Latham: 105, 107, 167, 205, 214; MP/Hambis: 177, 182, 284, 342, 357). The Common Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*, occurs almost throughout China. Most of his references would be to this species. In north-western China, there are also other pheasants. These include the Blue-eared Pheasant, *Crossoptilon auritum*, and the Blood Pheasant, *Ithaginus cruentus*. Both of these are quite large birds in the body, certainly considerably larger than the Common Pheasant. The very long-tailed pheasant to which Marco refers must be the Reeves's Pheasant, *Syrmaticus reevesii*. Its tail can be up to 1.5 metres (5 feet) long. It still occurs today in southern Gansu and Shaanxi provinces and was undoubtedly more common and widespread in the past. It was formerly recorded from Hebei province, though it is almost certainly extinct there now (De Schauensee 1984: 184–5, 192, 194–7; Zhongguo Yesheng Dongwu Baohu Xiehui (ed.) 1995: 88, 92, 96; MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000: 28, 34–5, 36–7).

Bagherlac (Sandgrouse)

Marco's 'bagherlac' or 'bargherlac' is clearly intended to be the sandgrouse, as has been previously suggested by some commentators (MP/Latham: 103; MP/Hambis: 175; MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 269, 272–3n). The species would almost certainly be Pallas's Sandgrouse, *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*. This bird is widespread in northern China, Mongolia and Central Asia. It does not, however, normally occur as far to the north as Marco says. Its occasional irruptions to areas well beyond its normal range, even as far as Britain, are well documented (De Schauensee 1984: 247; MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000: 132–3). It is possible that it might reach Arctic regions sporadically during such irruptions.

Lanners, Sakers, other falcons and Goshawks

Marco may well have enjoyed falconry himself and certainly knew that the Great Khan took pleasure in it. He mentions falcons a number of times in the book, particularly when describing the Khan's hunting excursions (MP/Latham: 142–7; MP/Hambis: 235–42). He specifically mentions Lanners, Sakers, Peregrine Falcons and Gyrfalcons. Lanners and Sakers are said to occur near Ejina and in Tibet (MP/Latham: 92, 174; MP/Hambis: 154, 295). The Saker, *Falco cherrug*, certainly occurs in China, right across the north and in a large part of Tibet, where it is still common. The Lanner, *Falco biarmicus*, does not. However, a race of the Barbary Falcon, *Falco pelegrinoides babylonicus* (sometimes considered to be a race of the Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*) occurs in Qinghai and Xinjiang and might formerly have been more widespread. It looks very similar to the Lanner. Quite possibly, it is this bird that Marco calls a Lanner. The Peregrine Falcon occurs virtually throughout China. The Gyrfalcon, *Falco rusticolus*, a bird of cold, northern regions, is usually found within the borders of China only in winter. It is recorded from northern Heilongjiang and from Inner Mongolia. It would be much commoner in the area north of China, which was, of course, also under the rule of Khubilai Khan (De Schauensee 1984: 173–4; MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000: 202–4).

The Goshawk, *Accipiter gentilis*, is not a falcon and would not have been used in the same way. It usually flies low when hunting, often taking prey from the branches of trees and bushes. Marco notes that Goshawks were for 'hawking along the riversides' (MP/Latham: 143; MP/Hambis: 237). This large hawk is widespread in Eurasia and occurs in both China and Europe. It breeds in the forests of northern Manchuria and the Tian Shan, wintering south of the Yangtze River, and also in south-east Tibet, eastern Qinghai and adjacent highland areas of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan, spending the winter at lower altitudes or migrating south to Yunnan (De Schauensee 1984: 162; MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000: 193).

Silkies

When Marco reaches Jianning in Fujian he describes, as a curiosity, hens that have ‘hair like cats’ instead of feathers (MP/Latham: 232; MP/Hambis: 378). He also says that they are black. Such fowl seem probably to have originated in China but have been known for some time in the West, where they are called silkies. Their ‘fur’ is, in fact, feathers, but the structure of each feather is modified so that the barbs do not hook together. It has sometimes been said that Chinese silkies always have white ‘fur’ (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 229n). This is not correct (Moule 1957: 55). There is a Chinese record of silkies with white, black and piebald plumage (BCGM: 2590). Although it dates from the late sixteenth century, it shows that these varieties existed long before modern times and that there is therefore nothing implausible about Marco’s observation. How long ago these birds appeared in China is uncertain. There is a possible mention of silkies in a text dating from the fourth century (Moule 1957: 55; QMYS: 332). Unfortunately, this reference is brief and hard to understand clearly. It says that there are chickens with ‘whiskers’ (huran), but whether this refers to the ‘fur’ of silkies or to whiskers near the beak is uncertain. It also mentions chickens with five claws, however, which is a characteristic of silkies (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1978: 353). A poem by Du Fu (712–70) probably refers to a silkie, under the name ‘wuji’ (Moule 1957: 55). The usual Chinese name for the bird is ‘wuguji’ (‘black-boned chicken’), but this is commonly abbreviated to ‘wuji’. Du Fu writes of the ‘wuji’ being used to cure sickness, and silkies were, and still are, greatly valued in Chinese medicine. As has often been noted, Odoric mentions silkies, too, but says that they are white (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 237).

Geese

Also in Fujian, there are geese of great size, according to Marco (MP/Latham: 234; MP/Hambis: 381). They have a swelling under the throat and a protuberance on top of the bill. This is a good description of the domesticated Chinese Geese, which were derived from the very large Swan Goose, *Anser cygnoides* (Scott 1957: 38). Odoric also noticed these geese and gave a good description of them (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 236).

‘Pharaoh’s rats’

Clearly Marco knew no name for these animals and either he or Rustichello came up with something that seemed adequate. Marco says that they were abundant on the steppes and that the Mongols ate them. In some versions of the text, he describes them as being like rabbits (MP/Latham: 98; MP/Hambis: 165). They must certainly be pikas or mouse-hares, *Ochotona* species, which are indeed related to hares and rabbits. They look something like a baby rabbit, but with smaller, rounded ears and no noticeable tail. The



Figure 9.2 A pika or mouse-hare (*Ochotona* sp.) in typical pose at the entrance to its burrow on the grasslands of Qinghai.

Latin name of the genus is derived from their Mongolian name. They are often extremely numerous and are eaten by almost every predator of the region, especially buzzards, falcons, foxes and weasels. I have personally seen huge numbers of them on the high plateau of Qinghai and Tibet and watched them being hunted by several different predators, including Sakers, buzzards and weasels. They live in burrows and feed on a variety of plants. In Mongolia, they are abundant wherever there is grassland (Prejevalsky 1876: i, 26–8). John of Plano Carpini refers to the Mongols eating mice and William of Rubruck also noted that the Mongols ate 'dormice and all kinds of mice with short tails', which would no doubt include pikas (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 16, 100).

Roe deer and other deer

The roe deer, *Capreolus capreolus* L., the same species as in Europe (but different subspecies) occurs widely in northern and western China (Sheng Helin (ed.) 1992: 234–43). In Chinese, it is called Pao or Paozi. Marco reports roebuck from several places (MP/Latham: 169, 176, 189, 214; MP/Hambis: 288, 298, 318, 357). In some of these they do not occur, for example, Myanmar and the Xichang area. It must be probable that he used the name also for other small deer, for which no European name existed at the time.

These would include the various species of muntjac that are distributed across East Asia, of which four occur in China, principally in the centre and south of the country. The general Chinese name for muntjac is Ji or Jizi. Both the Indian Muntjac, *Muntiacus muntjak* Zimmermann, and the Reeves' Muntjac, *Muntiacus reevesi* Ogilby, occur in Myanmar and southern Sichuan (Sheng Helin (ed.) 1992: 126–70). The latter species is naturalized in Britain and other parts of Europe today.

There is also mention of fallow deer in the book (MP/Latham: 142; MP/Hambis: 215, 234–5; MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 364). The fallow deer of Europe is *Dama dama* L. It does not occur in China. The most similar Chinese deer is the Sika, *Cervus nippon* Temminck, which is about the same size and also usually has a spotted coat. In Chinese, it is called Mei Hua Lu or Hua Lu. It used to occur much more widely than it does today. In Shanxi and Hebei, it is probably already extinct. There are surviving populations in eastern Manchuria, northern Sichuan and southern Gansu, Jiangxi and adjacent areas of Anhui and Zhejiang, and in Taiwan (Sheng Helin (ed.) 1992: 202–12). The red deer, *Cervus elaphus* L., occurs quite widely in China, mainly in northern Manchuria, around the eastern margins of the Tibetan plateau and in the mountains of Xinjiang. Until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were still wild populations in Shanxi and Hebei. It is called Ma Lu ('Horse Deer') in Chinese (Sheng Helin (ed.) 1992: 213–23). When Marco talks of 'harts', it must usually be this deer that he means (MP/Latham: 126, 141, 169; MP/Hambis: 215, 234–5). Marco also notes that the Mecrit (Mekrit, Mescript), that is, the Merkid, ride on stags, which they herd like cattle (MP/Latham: 103; MP/Hambis: 174; MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 269). These are, of course, reindeer. There are still reindeer herders in parts of the north of the Mongolian Republic today. Within China, in north-eastern Inner Mongolia and adjacent Heilongjiang province, some of the Ewenki, formerly called Solon or Yakut, also herd reindeer (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982a: 22; Sheng Helin (ed.) 1992: 251–6).

'Beyamini' or wild cattle

The wild cattle which Marco calls 'beyamini' have almost completely baffled previous commentators (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 50, 52n, iii, 83; MP/Hambis: 294; MP/Latham: 174). The best that they have been able to suggest is that the animal must be the Gaur or Gayal, *Bos gaurus* H. Smith. This seems extremely unlikely, however, for the Gaur is an animal of hill country, rarely ascending to above 1,800 metres (6,000 feet) (Prater 1971: 243). It has only a very limited distribution within China, in the extreme south-east of Tibet and parts of western and southern Yunnan (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1975: 576; Yin Binggao and Liu Wulin (eds) 1993: 88). Although it was probably more numerous in the past, its range inside China can never have been much greater, due to lack of suitable climate and habitat. The animal to which Marco refers must surely be the Takin, *Budorcas taxicolor* Hodgson

(Wilson 1913: ii, 154). The Takin is called Bamen in modern Tibetan, though this name may also be locally applied to other animals. Chinese names for the Takin include Ye Niu ('wild cattle') and Bai Yang (formerly pronounced 'beyang') (Wilson 1913: ii, 159; Shaanxisheng Dongwu Yanjiusuo (ed.) 1981: 54). The second name, which means 'white sheep', could not be descriptive of the animal and must be derived from a non-Chinese, presumably Tibetan, name. Judging by this, it may well be that an old or dialect form of the Tibetan name would have been 'beyamen' or something similar. The Takin belongs to the group of animals known as goat-antelopes. It is heavily built with short, thick horns and resembles no other mammal very closely. It is widespread in the mountains of western China along the borders with Tibet, in Shaanxi, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, as well as in eastern Tibet (Shaanxisheng Dongwu Yanjiusuo (ed.) 1981: 54; Yin Binggao and Liu Wulin (eds) 1993: 92). It is important to note that, apart from this mention by Marco, the Takin remained unknown in Europe until the second half of the nineteenth century.

Sable

Sable was called 'the king of furs' by the Mongols, according to Marco (MP/Latham: 145; MP/Hambis: 240; MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 405, 409–10n). It was indeed frequently considered to be among the finest of all furs and, as Marco says, very valuable. He compares the Sable with a marten. This is a good comparison, for sables and martens are very closely related, belonging to the same genus. In Europe, there are two widespread species of marten, the Pine Marten (*Martes martes* L.) and the Stone or Beech Marten (*Martes foina* Erxleben). The second is more common in southern Europe and is even found in towns, while the Pine Marten has a more northerly distribution and usually keeps to forested areas, avoiding humans. Both occur throughout most of Italy. They are fairly similar in size, the Stone Marten being slightly smaller on average, up to about 49 cm (19 in) long, including the tail. The Sable (*Martes zibellina* L.) can attain 56 cm (22 in). Females are generally smaller than males. Called Zi Diao (or just Diao) in Chinese, the Sable occurs in the forests of Manchuria, as well as in parts of Mongolia and Siberia. It was formerly more widespread. It climbs well and spends much of its time in trees, its habits being very similar to those of the Pine Marten, which does not occur in China. The Stone Marten, however, occurs in the Himalaya as far east as Sikkim and in Tibet, western China, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1975: 565; Shaanxisheng Dongwu Yanjiusuo (ed.) 1981: 30; Hofmann 1995: 130–2; Losange (ed.) 1999: 90–2).

Papiones

These animals are mentioned only in the Toledo manuscript (MP/Latham: 234; MP/Hambis: 381). To judge by their omnivorous diet of sugar cane and

fat, the value of their fur, their nocturnal habits and their boldness in stealing from caravans, these must be Chinese Ferret-badgers, *Melogale moschata* Gray. In Chinese, they are called You Huan, Shan Huan or Meizi, among other names. Marco compares them to foxes, which seems not unreasonable. They are more closely related to weasels and badgers than to foxes, but in general appearance are somewhat fox-like. Ferret-badgers are rather smaller than a fox and comparatively shorter in the leg, but have a fairly long and bushy tail, quite similar to a fox's brush. Their colouration is not very different, though they are never as red as some foxes. The skins would look very much the same. They are said to be well adapted to eating roots, with probing snouts and strong claws for digging. They are also recorded as eating fruit, birds, small mammals and insects (Prater 1971: 160–1). It is very likely that they might cause serious damage to sugar cane. The Ferret-badger is one of the most important fur-bearing animals of southern China (Shaanxisheng Dongwu Yanjiusuo (ed.) 1981: 35). Marco has been criticized for retailing 'oral legend relating to . . . foxes that ate only sugar-cane' (Wood 1995: 150), but such criticism is entirely unjustified. In talking of these animals, as so often in similar cases, Marco faced the problem of lack of vocabulary. Much of what he described was entirely unknown in Europe at the period. There were no names in European languages for these Chinese animals. John of Plano Carpini refers specifically to this problem, in relation to a Russian animal, 'the name of which I do not know how to translate into Latin' (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 39).

Wild asses

North of Ejina, says Marco, there is a desert region full of wildlife, including wild asses (MP/Latham: 92; MP/Hambis: 154). These are the Asiatic Wild Ass, *Equus hemionus* Pallas, sometimes known as Kiang. They are quite large, up to about 120 cm (4 feet) high at the shoulder. They live mainly in desert and semi-desert areas, withstand extremes of heat and cold well and are capable of going several days without drinking. Wild Asses are still quite common in parts of Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, Qinghai and Tibet (Prater 1971: 227–8; Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1975: 571; Yin Binggao and Liu Wulin (eds) 1993: 81). I have personally seen several near the Ngoring Lake in Qinghai. They seemed inquisitive, following a vehicle, though keeping their distance. Their size makes them noticeable, especially since they can sometimes occur in large herds.

Yaks

The hairy cattle of southern Gansu which Marco describes are, of course, yaks, *Bos grunniens* L. (MP/Latham: 104; MP: Hambis: 176). It is doubtful whether there were any that were truly wild in that region, even during the thirteenth century, but it is by no means unlikely that some had been neglected



Figure 9.3 Yaks in Tibet: the large, hairy cattle of Xizhou that Marco describes are certainly yaks.

and had become feral at the time of the Mongol conquest of Tangut and the Xizhou area. There are still true wild yaks today in parts of Tibet and Qinghai. They are normally completely black. The bulls can stand 1.8 metres (6 feet) high at the shoulder and are powerfully built creatures with long, shaggy hair, so it is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to compare them with elephants. Most domesticated yaks are black or black and white, though other colours also occur occasionally. The hybrids with ordinary cattle, which are mentioned in Ramusio's version of the text, are indeed, as Marco says, very strong and often used for pulling ploughs (Prater 1971: 246–7; Yin Binggao and Liu Wulin (eds) 1993: 88–9). I have personally seen them ploughing in the Gansu Corridor. It should again be noted that, apart from Marco's information, little or nothing was known in Europe about yaks before the eighteenth century.

Crocodiles (serpents with two legs)

Marco is uncharacteristically inaccurate in his description of crocodiles or alligators (MP/Latham: 178–9; MP/Hambis: 301–3). It is probably unlikely that any such creatures occurred in Yunnan even in his time, though they would certainly have existed in adjacent Myanmar and other parts of South-east Asia. They might perhaps just have occurred within the borders of Mongol Yunnan, in the extreme south and south-west. More likely their skins and other body parts were traded into Yunnan from Myanmar and

other neighbouring regions. Thus, Marco may never have actually seen one alive, or he may only have seen them partly submerged in rivers, when he was in Myanmar. His description is probably based mainly on skins and hearsay. The very large ones that he mentions must surely have been Saltwater Crocodiles, *Crocodylus porosus* Schneider. This is the largest of the crocodiles and can attain lengths over 6 metres (20 feet). This crocodile used to occur on the south-east coast of China. It is still found on some Indian Ocean coasts and, in the past, may well have penetrated up the Irrawaddy and Mekong Rivers to areas not very far from Yunnan. The Gharial, *Gavialis gangeticus* Gmelin, certainly occurs in Myanmar (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1975: 511). So does, or perhaps did, the Siamese Crocodile, *Crocodylus siamensis* Schneider, which is also recorded from Laos, Thailand and other parts of South-east Asia. It is a large crocodile that can grow to 3 or 4 metres (10–12 feet) in length (Britton 1995–2002). The flesh of crocodiles and alligators was considered very good to eat. Southern Chinese were reported by a late Ming dynasty source to esteem their meat highly. Parts of them were also used to treat growths (BCGM: 2382). Marco's statement that they have only two legs seems perplexing. This misapprehension appears, however, to derive from local myths. Among my personal collection of photographs is one, taken in January 1983, of a painting in a Buddhist temple of the Dai people in Jinghong, Xishuangbanna, in southern Yunnan. The painting depicts, among other things, two dragon-like creatures with only two legs. Clearly, such an animal exists in Dai mythology. Marco must have heard

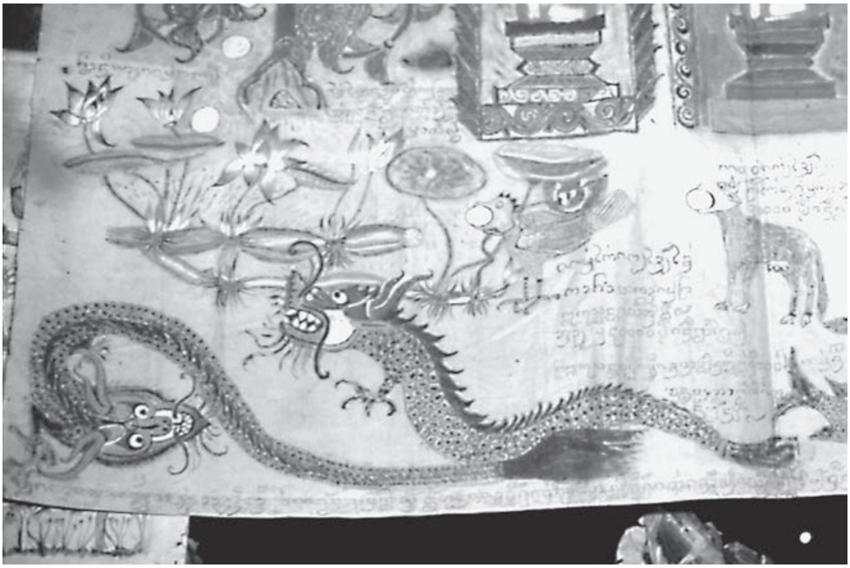


Figure 9.4 Dragon-like 'serpents' with two legs, as depicted in a votive banner in a Buddhist temple in Jinghong in the far south of Yunnan province.

accounts of it and been influenced in his description of crocodiles by what he had been told.

Poisonous grass in the mountains of Tangut

Marco reports that a grass or herb grows in the mountains of Tangut, which 'makes beasts that feed on it lose their hoofs'. Local animals, however, recognize it and avoid eating it (MP/Latham: 90; MP/Hambis: 151). This seemingly strange story is corroborated by other sources. The Russian explorer, Prejevalsky, describing the flora of the mountains of this area, says: 'A poisonous kind of grass (*Lolium* sp.) grows here and in the Ala shan mountains; it is called *Khoro ubusu* by the Mongols, and is very injurious to cattle, especially camels, the native herds carefully avoiding it' (Prejevalsky 1876: ii, 81). This might be *Lolium persicum* Boiss. and Hohen., which is recorded from the Kunlun Mountains and Qinghai (Xinjiang Bayi Nongxueyuan 1982: i, 141). Another, stronger, candidate is *Achnatherum inebrians* (Hance) Keng (*Stipa inebrians* Hance), called in Chinese 'Drunken Horse Grass', Zui Ma Cao. It is quite widespread, growing in the Tian Shan mountains, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, western Sichuan and Tibet, as well as in the Mongolian Republic. The type specimen of the species came from the Ala Shan (Xinjiang Bayi Nongxueyuan 1982: i, 253; Guo Benzhao (ed.) 1987: 326–7). In both these grasses, the toxicity is not due to the grass itself, but to fungal infection of the plant. The *Lolium* at least is very susceptible to this (Hou Kuanzhao (ed.) 1982: 282). *Lolium* is the rye-grass genus and the fungus is ergot of rye. The fungus infecting *Achnatherum* is undoubtedly similar. Ergotism can cause hallucinations and symptoms like those of drunkenness. It can also cause dry gangrene of the extremities, so that animals might literally 'lose their hoofs'. The Yugurs, a nomadic people of Turko-Mongol descent, live in the mountains on the Qinghai–Gansu border, south of the area between Jiuquan and Zhangye. They are familiar with *Achnatherum inebrians*. In Western Yugur (a Turkic language), it is called 'Jerwan' or 'Qhal Oht'. The latter means 'mad grass'. In Eastern Yugur (a Mongolian language), it is called 'Xoro Wesën', 'Poison Grass' (Roos *et al.* 2003). This Eastern Yugur name clearly resembles the Mongolian name recorded by Prejevalsky. Coupled with the fact that Prejevalsky says that his '*Lolium* sp.' grew in the Ala Shan, where the *Achnatherum* certainly grows but *Lolium persicum* is not recorded, this makes it virtually certain that the grass in question is *Achnatherum inebrians*.

Camphor (in Fujian)

On leaving Fuzhou, travelling towards Quanzhou, Marco reports that there is much woodland, containing 'many of the trees that produce camphor' (MP/Latham: 237; MP/Hambis: 384). It is indeed the case that this tree grows in Fujian, which is one of half a dozen southern Chinese provinces

which are the principal producers of camphor. Called Zhang in Chinese, it is obtained from the tree *Cinnamomum camphora* (L.) Presl. (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1994: 867–9).

Cinnamon in Tibet and Gaindu

Marco says that cinnamon is produced both in Tibet and in Gaindu (the Xichang area) (MP/Latham: 173, 176; MP/Hambis: 294, 298). True cinnamon is *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* Blume, which certainly does not grow in these regions. Other related species of tree are also used more or less interchangeably, however, including *C. aromaticum* Nees (*C. cassia* Nees ex Blume). Cinnamon is the inner bark of the tree, usually taken from young branches. There are trees of the genus *Cinnamomum* that grow in western Sichuan. The most likely one for production of a kind of cinnamon would be *C. wilsonii* Gamble (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1994: 450–70). Strictly, this and related trees produce cassia-bark, called Guipi in Chinese, but this is very similar to cinnamon. *Cinnamomum wilsonii* grows at altitudes up to 2,400 metres (8,000 feet). A closely related species, with which it has sometimes been confused, is *Cinnamomum contractum* H. W. Li. This grows in south-east Tibet at up to 2,800 metres (9,250 feet) above sea level (Li Xiwen (ed.) 1982: 214–16). Marco also says that in Gaindu there are 'spices that never come to our country'. This is a phrase that he uses elsewhere, too (MP/Latham: 168; MP/Hambis: 285). Here again, it is difficult for him to say more about these spices because they are unknown in Europe and have no names in European languages.

'Cloves' in Gaindu

Gaindu is also a source of cloves, according to Marco (MP/Latham: 176; MP/Hambis: 298). True cloves are obtained from *Syzygium aromaticum* (L.) Merrill et Perry, of the family Myrtaceae, which grows in the Moluccas and is not native to China. The Xichang area is certainly not hot enough for the genuine clove tree to flourish there. It is probable that what Marco had in mind were the immature fruits of trees of the genus *Cinnamomum*. Those of *C. aromaticum* Nees are certainly used as what are called Rou Guizi, Guizi or Guiding in Chinese (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1960: 343; BCSY: 191–2). However, the Xichang region is not hot enough for *C. aromaticum*, either, so once again it is likely that *Cinnamomum wilsonii* was the source. Marco's description of the tree would certainly fit a *Cinnamomum* species very well.

Galangal (Galingale)

This is the root of a plant of the ginger family, Zingiberaceae. Marco notes its production in different parts of China, as well as in Bengal and Java



Figure 9.5 Gaoliang Jiang (Galangal) from two different places, as depicted in the official Song pharmacopoeia, printed in 1249 (ZHBC).

(MP/Latham: 168, 189, 231–2, 251; MP/Hambis: 285, 318, 377–8, 409). The word 'galangal' may derive, via Arabic, from the Chinese name for the plant, 'Gaoliang Jiang'. True galangal is obtained from *Alpinia officinarum* Hance, but other plants of the genus are also used, especially *Alpinia galanga*

(L.) Willd. In Fujian, the most likely source is perhaps *Alpinia japonica* (Thunb.) Miq. (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1959: 492–6; Wu Delin (ed.) 1981: 71–2, 100–103; ZHBC: 224).

Ginger

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale* Rosc.) originates from tropical Asia, possibly including south China, but it has been cultivated for so long that its exact area of wild distribution is unclear. Marco notes its production in many parts of China, including northern areas such as Hezhong and Hanzhong (MP/Latham: 167–9, 176, 212, 231–2; MP/Hambis: 284–5, 287, 298, 354, 377–8). It was known in China more than 2,000 years ago, for it is mentioned in the *Analects* of Confucius (Legge 1960: i, 233; Confucius 1979: 103). During the Song dynasty, it was said to be grown everywhere, the best coming from Hanzhou, Wenzhou and Chizhou (ZHBC: 194). Hanzhou was in Sichuan, Wenzhou in Zhejiang and Chizhou in Anhui. It has been questioned whether much ginger was grown near Suzhou (Wood 1995: 90), but there is no good reason to suppose that it was not. As was suggested above, with reference to rhubarb, local production must have been much more important at this period, when inter-regional markets and transport systems had been disrupted by the division of China and by warfare. Ginger can be grown in northern China during summer without much difficulty. An early agricultural treatise, dating from the first half of the sixth century, describes how to cultivate ginger (QMYS: 157). It was written by a man who was probably from modern Shandong province and was certainly an official there (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 140). Ginger is reported to be cultivated almost everywhere in China today (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo (ed.) 1981: 228).

Pepper, long pepper, cubebs

Pepper was an extremely important product in the medieval world. A large international trade in it developed at an early period, at first mainly handled by Arabs and Persians. Pepper reaching Europe during the thirteenth century would have generally passed through Arab hands. As a result, it was expensive. Marco's talk of large quantities of pepper could not have failed to impress his medieval European audience (MP/Latham: 216–17, 237; MP/Hambis: 371, 385). Some doubts have been cast, however, on whether the amounts of pepper said by Marco to be used daily in Hangzhou, and imported into Quanzhou, are credible (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 210n; Wood 1995: 10). Although some very peppery dishes are still eaten, such as the peppery soup (hula tang) of Henan, pepper is not very greatly used in Chinese cuisine today. This cannot necessarily be taken to mean that it was not used much more commonly in the past, however. In the late sixteenth century, it was stated that pepper was 'an item of daily use' (BCGM: 1858).

Even more significant are references to pepper from the period of the Song dynasty. It is included with oil, salt, ginger, tea and soy products among a list of daily essentials. The corrupt late Song minister, Jia Sidao (1213–75), is reported to have had 800 piculs of pepper among his stores (Shiba 1970: 202, 206). All this suggests that pepper may indeed have been used in considerable quantities during the Yuan dynasty. It must be borne in mind that eating habits have often changed very greatly during the past few centuries. For example, the impact of New World crops on Old World cuisine has been enormous. The potato, unknown in Europe before the late sixteenth century, has radically altered the diet of many Europeans. It is hard to imagine, too, what Italian cuisine was like before the advent of the tomato, or Indian cuisine without chilli. Chilli has had a significant impact in China, too. Indeed, it may perhaps have helped to displace pepper from the Chinese kitchen, for chillis can be grown in much of China, while the cultivation of pepper is confined to the most tropical parts of the country, such as southern Guangdong, Guangxi and Yunnan provinces and Hainan Island. Marco was, of course, in China before the arrival of chilli.

It is possible that he may have included Sichuan pepper (huajiao) with the pepper carried daily into Hangzhou. This is a native Chinese product, much used today in the cuisine of Sichuan province but also to a lesser extent elsewhere. It is the seeds and seed-cases of various species of *Zanthoxylum*, especially *Zanthoxylum bungeanum* Maxim. (Huang Chengjiu 1997: 44–6). True pepper is *Piper nigrum* L.; long pepper (Bibo) is *Piper longum* L.; cubeb or Java pepper is *Piper cubeba* Linn. f. (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1960: 498–503, 508–12). Pepper has been known and used in China since the Tang dynasty (ZHBC: 349). Both pepper and long pepper are cultivated in China today. *Piper longum* is native to southern Yunnan. The genus *Piper* is a very large one, with perhaps as many as 2000 species, of which about 60 occur in China (Wu and Raven (eds) 1999: 111, 115, 119).

Jujubes

Jujubes 'twice the size of dates', which are used for making bread, are said by Marco to be grown in the area near Lingiu (Liucheng, near Xuzhou) (MP/Latham: 200; MP/Hambis: 333). The jujube or Chinese date is the fruit of *Ziziphus jujuba* Mill., a large shrub or small to medium tree native to China. Cultivated jujubes are believed to have been derived from the wild *Ziziphus jujuba* var. *spinosus* (Bunge) Hu ex H. F. Chow (Chen Yilin (ed.) 1982: 133–6; Guo Yuxin 1982: 15–19). The jujube has been cultivated in China probably since prehistoric times, certainly for a minimum of about 3,000 years. Many different cultivars have been developed. No less than 72 are listed in a work of the Yuan dynasty (Guo Yuxin 1982: 1). The fruit somewhat resembles the date, though the tree is entirely unrelated and looks nothing like a date-palm. Jujubes are often larger than dates, sometimes

very much larger. Some cultivars yield fruits weighing up to about 70 gm ($2^1/_4$ oz) each, though this is exceptional (Guo Yuxin 1982: 32). A method for making a kind of flour from jujubes is described in a Chinese agricultural treatise dating from the early sixth century (QMYS: 184). The jujube ‘bread’ that Marco mentions is still made today. Shandong, not very far from Xuzhou, is famous for its jujubes. There is a place called Zaozhuang (‘Jujube Village’) in southern Shandong, just north of Xuzhou.

Pears (very large)

Some of the most remarkable fruits on sale on the markets of Hangzhou, says Marco, are pears weighing ten pounds each (MP/Latham: 215; MP/Hambis: 358). This is very probably an exaggeration, as has been suggested before (Wood 1995: 91), but perhaps not a very great exaggeration. A work of the fourth century, quoted by later sources, refers to pears weighing six jin (Chinese pounds), saying: ‘several people divide and eat them’ (WZNS: 125; NZQS: ii, 772). One commentator on Marco has referred to Chinese pears weighing seven to ten pounds each (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 210n). Overestimation must be suspected in both these cases. Realistically, it is unlikely that any Chinese pear would much exceed half the weights quoted. A cultivar of Chinese pear, ‘Yan Dang Xue Li’, from Zhejiang province, is recorded as bearing fruit averaging about 680 gm (1 lb 8 oz) in weight and sometimes exceeding 1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz). There are also several other cultivars which can produce fruit weighing 1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) or more (Wu Gengmin 1984: 60, 71, 72, 79). Marco’s description of the fruits fits Chinese pears well. The suggestion that he meant the Chinese Quince (Mugua), *Chaenomeles sinensis* Koehne, seems unnecessary (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 210n).

Peaches (very large)

Marco notes that, in the area near Cianglu (Cangzhou), very large peaches are produced, weighing ‘two small pounds’ each (MP/Latham: 195; MP/Hambis: 326). He is slightly outdone by a Chinese encyclopedia of the early seventh century. It quotes an earlier work that refers to peaches each weighing two and a half Chinese pounds (YWLJ: iii, 1470). It is again likely that both Marco and the Chinese writer exaggerated somewhat. A cultivar of peach called ‘Fei Tao’, from Feicheng, west of Tai’an in Shandong, is recorded as bearing large fruits that can weigh as much as 420 gm (1 lb) each (Wu Gengmin 1984: 144). Feicheng is a fairly short distance south of Cangzhou. Marco also mentions white-fleshed and yellow-fleshed peaches on the markets of Hangzhou (MP/Latham: 215; MP/Hambis: 358). It has been suggested that the yellow peaches might have been apricots (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 210n), but although many more peaches with white flesh than with yellow are grown in China, the latter certainly exist (Wu Gengmin 1984: 141). Despite its botanical name, *Prunus persica* (L.) Sieb. et Zucc., the peach

originated from China. It is one of a fairly small number of Chinese plants that were carried westwards at an early date, probably spreading gradually along the overland 'Silk Road'.

Spikenard

Spikenard or nard is recorded by Marco in both the region near Cacionfu (Hezhong) and in Bengala (Bengal) (MP/Latham: 168, 189; MP/Hambis: 285, 318). The Chinese name for spikenard is Gansong or Gansong Xiang. It is used mainly for its fragrance, but also in Chinese medicine. True spikenard is the root of *Nardostachys jatamansi* (D. Don) DC., a plant from the Himalaya and western China (Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet), growing at altitudes of about 2,600–5,000 metres (8,500–16,500 feet). The closely related *Nardostachys chinensis* Batal. is also used in the same way. It occurs only in China, in Gansu, Qinghai and north-west Sichuan, especially near Songpan and Lixian. The genus is a small one, with only three species (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1981: 301–6; Lu Anmin and Chen Shukun (eds) 1986: 25–7). Interestingly, there is a record, dating from the period of the Song dynasty, of Gansong growing in Liaozhou, a district in eastern Shanxi, in the Taihang mountains (ZHBC: 236). It is unfortunately impossible to be sure whether this was a similar plant with fragrant roots, used as a substitute for Gansong, or if *Nardostachys chinensis* was cultivated there at the time. Whatever the case, it tends to confirm Marco's observation. In Bengal, the spikenard would have come from the Himalaya and in Hezhong, from the Taihang mountains.

Lign-aloes, aloes wood

Lign-aloes or aloes wood, called Chenxiang in Chinese, is the fragrant heartwood of the trees *Aquilaria agallocha* Roxb. and *A. malaccensis* Lam., of the family Thymelaeaceae. These do not grow in China, but other species of the genus do, and *A. sinensis* (Lour.) Gilg is used in a similar way. It is known as Tu (local) Chenxiang. It grows in the extreme south of China, from southern Yunnan to Fujian and Taiwan, and especially on Hainan Island (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1994: 597–602; ZHBC: 307–8). Marco mentions aloes wood in China only as an import, however (MP/Latham: 237; MP/Hambis: 385).

Sugar

What Marco says about the refining of sugar is very possibly correct (MP/Latham: 232–3; MP/Hambis: 379). There are references to granulated sugar (sha tang) from before the Yuan dynasty, but this may well have been brown and slightly sticky (BCGM: 1888–9). A Chinese manual dating from the early seventeenth century gives a method for making sugar (zao tang)

and then a separate method for making white sugar (zao bai tang). The initial process is the same, with additional refining to produce the whiteness. The whitest sugar is said to be called 'Western Ocean Sugar' (xiyang tang), because sugar from the 'Western Ocean', which at this period must mean sugar brought to China in European ships, is very white (TGKW: 167–71). This implies that the Chinese had not been able to make really white sugar for very long at this period.

Tong Oil

This is not mentioned by name, but Marco describes the use of oil from a tree for making ships watertight. The oil can only be tong oil, which is derived from the fruits of trees. Two different species of the genus *Aleurites* are cultivated for this purpose, *A. fordii* Hemsl. and *A. montana* (Lour.) Wils. The oil is pressed from the seeds and boiled before use. It has been reported to be mixed with lime and bamboo shavings for caulking boats (Wilson 1913: ii, 64–7). No doubt hemp, mentioned by Marco, would serve as well as bamboo shavings. These two trees are sometimes now placed in a separate genus, *Vernicia*. Tong oil is still an important Chinese product today, with a significant export market (Qiu Huaxing (ed.) 1996: 142–5).

Marco's description of Chinese ships (MP/Latham: 241–3; MP/Hambis: 393–6), with their watertight compartments, multiple layers of planking and so on, is in complete accordance with what is known from Chinese sources of the Song dynasty (Shiba 1970: 6–9).

Paper made from the inner bark of Mulberry trees

Paper money of the Yuan dynasty was, according to Marco, printed on paper made from the inner bark of the same mulberry trees of which the leaves were fed to silkworms (MP/Latham: 147; MP/Hambis: 246). Such paper has a long history in China. Examination of pieces of paper found in Xinjiang, dating from the third to the eighth centuries, have shown that some of it is made from mulberry bark (Carter 1955: 6). A Chinese monograph, dating from the late tenth century, mentions mulberry bark paper (MP/Yule-Cordier: iii, 71; BCGM: 2194). The process of making paper from the bark of trees, including the mulberry, is described in a manual of the late Ming dynasty (TGKW: 331–3). The mulberry on which silkworms are fed, called Sang in Chinese, is *Morus alba* L. It was originally endemic to central and northern China, but is now very widely cultivated (Wu and Raven (eds) 2003: 23).

Saffron-like fruit in Fujian

From Marco's brief description, particularly as it is the fruit that is used (according to several versions of the text), and from the area of origin (MP/Latham: 231; MP/Hambis: 377), this is most likely *Gardenia jasminoides* Ellis, called Zhizi in Chinese (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo



Figure 9.6 Picking mulberry leaves for feeding silkworms, as depicted in the agricultural treatise written by Wang Zhen in about 1313 (WZNS). The original illustrations have not survived: this picture is taken from a sixteenth-century edition of the book.

et al. (eds) 1960: 578–81; ZHBC: 320). Safflower, *Carthamus tinctorius* L., is unlikely to be the plant intended. Called Honghua in Chinese, it is not recorded as being grown in China before the Song dynasty. It is its flowers that are used for colouring and it grows best in areas drier than Fujian. Today, it is principally cultivated in Xinjiang (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al*. (eds) 1994: 202). The Tu Honghua which has been suggested as possibly this plant (MP/Yule-Cordier: iii, 98) remains unidentified. There is, however, an error in the source in which its description occurs (BCSY:

105). The identical information first appeared in a work of the eleventh century, but the name of the plant is there given as Tu Hongshan, not Tu Honghua (ZHBC: 536; BCGM: 1154). There is, in fact, nothing to suggest that this plant gave a yellow colour. The name Tu Honghua has also been applied both to a species of thistle, *Cirsium japonicum* DC., and to the China Rose, *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* L. (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1961: 1; Zhongyi Yanjiuyuan *et al.* (eds) 1982: 18, 177), but neither of these seems at all likely to be the plant that Marco mentions.

As has been remarked above, much of the knowledge that Marco conveys regarding the plants and animals of China was entirely unknown in Europe at the period. He was clearly an acute observer, only occasionally straying into serious inaccuracy. The worst example is his description of crocodiles as having only two legs. Overall, both the quantity and the quality of his information are extremely impressive. It is very unlikely indeed that more than a small part of this knowledge could have been obtained at second hand. If it had, it could scarcely have been so accurate. No other medieval traveller has left anything like as much information about the flora and fauna of eastern Asia. Both John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck must surely have seen some wildlife during their journeys. John says virtually nothing at all about this. William gives just a little information, when talking about what the Mongols ate and the furs that they wore (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 100–1). He mentions 'falcons and other birds' being brought to Möngke Khan, but he does not bother to tell us what kind of falcons they were, or what the 'other birds' may have been (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 154). Odoric does rather better, giving brief information about geese, ducks, hens and snakes, as well as mentioning white silkies and fishing with cormorants (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 236–8). He falls down slightly through being unable to identify the cormorants properly, although they are common enough birds in Europe and occur in the Mediterranean region. Ibn Battuta can manage little better than ridiculous tales of Chinese cocks as big as ostriches and of hens that were too big for one pot, so had to be cooked in two. One wonders why, in a land where hens were so big, cooking pots were not made larger! Contradicting both Marco and Odoric, he erroneously claims that Chinese geese were very small (Ibn Battuta 1982: 315; Mackintosh-Smith (ed.) 2002: 262). He did, however, notice the existence of grapes, plums, watermelons and sugar in China (Ibn Battuta 1982: 313–14), but his attention does not seem to have been caught by any plant or animal that he could not eat. Marco is unique because he was manifestly very interested in plants and animals. This may have been mainly because they could be hunted, or had some economic value, but his interest was strong enough for him to notice details that others simply overlooked. In some cases, he was clearly just impressed by what he saw, as with the great, hairy yaks of Gansu. Marco's observations of China's fauna and flora are in themselves a very strong argument in favour of his truthfulness and of his account being based principally on personal experience.

10 Wine, women and poison

Although Marco does not mention the drinking of tea, he does record the wines drunk in various parts of China and what they were brewed from. Today, Chinese show a strong preference for distilled spirits. During the thirteenth century, distillation was very much less common. At that time, it may have been a new process in China. Marco's wines, therefore, were in general only fermented, with one possible exception. He states that most north Chinese ('inhabitants of the province of Cathay') drank a kind of wine that he apparently considered to be different from all other Chinese wines. Made from rice and various spices, he says that it is 'beautifully clear' and causes intoxication faster than other wines, 'because it is very heating' (MP/Latham: 156; MP/Hambis: 259). This is not sufficient information to allow of certainty, and opinions have varied (Lu *et al.* 1972: 87), but there is at least the possibility that this refers to a distilled liquor. It would have been a novelty to Marco, for distillation of alcoholic drinks was unknown or virtually unknown in Europe at the period. The earliest mention of distilled alcoholic beverages in Europe appears to be a Catalan reference dating from 1313 (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 1.2).

Wine was undoubtedly of ancient origin in China, certainly predating the Shang dynasty (c. 1600 BCE), and very possibly Neolithic or even earlier. It is, in fact, quite likely that alcoholic drinks originated more or less naturally, through fermentation of fruits and of milk (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 1.1). Subsequently, the natural processes that produced these fermented liquids would have been copied and the knowledge of how to control them more or less exactly would gradually have been acquired. The Chinese character 'jiu', often translated 'wine', but in fact meaning any alcoholic drink, is ancient (Xu Zhongshu *et al.* (eds) 1993: 1488). Distilled liquors are certainly of much more recent origin, however. Precise dating presents as yet unresolved problems. There are a variety of opinions regarding the time at which distillation of spirits for drinking began in China. The earliest possible period seems to be the Eastern Han dynasty (1st and 2nd centuries). Certainly the Chinese already had the technology to undertake a fairly inefficient form of distilling at that time, with the possibility of producing alcohol contents of up to about 26 per cent by volume. There is no evidence, however, that this was applied

to the making of strong drinks. Although there are many references in Chinese literature of the succeeding few centuries to the brewing of alcoholic beverages, there is no mention of anything that might be distilled liquor. If it had existed then, it is unlikely to have been so completely overlooked (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 1.2, 4.1).

It has also been suggested that distilled alcoholic drinks first began to be produced in China during the Tang dynasty (Lu *et al.* 1972: 87–9). There are references at that period to 'shao jiu' ('burnt wine', or perhaps 'fired wine'). At a later period, this term certainly meant distilled liquor, but it seems that during the Tang dynasty it referred to wine heated in a closed container in order to improve its flavour (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 1.2). This process would not, of course, cause any increase in alcohol content. There was, however, undoubtedly a kind of wine at this period that contained a higher percentage of alcohol than would result from simple fermentation. This was obtained, not by true distillation, but by freezing. The method seems first to have been used with grape wine in the Gaochang area in modern Xinjiang, as early as the sixth century (Lu *et al.* 1972: 98–9). It relies on the fact that water freezes at a higher temperature than alcohol. If wine is allowed to freeze partially and pieces of ice are taken out of it, then more water than alcohol is removed and the alcohol content of the remaining wine is raised. This process was easily carried out during the cold winters of the Gaochang region. The strong wine produced in this way became known in China and was imported from Gaochang, before the region was conquered and incorporated into the Tang empire in 640. After the conquest, the secret of the manufacture of this kind of strong drink spread into China. It was subsequently produced in areas of the north where grapes were grown and the winters were cold enough. It was known as 'dong jiu' ('frozen wine') (BCGM: 1568). Its alcohol content must have been variable and is unlikely to have been as high as can be obtained by distillation. There does not seem to be any evidence that the freezing process was applied to anything other than grape wine.

The most likely period for the beginning of true distillation of spirits for drinking in China is during the Jin and Southern Song dynasties. It very probably began in the north. A still, believed to date from the time of the Emperor Shi Zong of the Jin dynasty (reigned 1161–89), has been archaeologically excavated in Qinglong in north-eastern Hebei province. There is unfortunately some uncertainty about its dating. Nevertheless, taken together with numerous references to what may well be distilled liquor and descriptions of what are certainly stills (though not necessarily used for distilling drinks) in literature of the Song dynasty, the probability is that distillation of alcoholic drinks began in China at least as early as the twelfth century (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 1.2). It undoubtedly became widespread during the Yuan dynasty, as there are definite references to distilled liquors during that period (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 1.2; BCGM: 1568).

The still of the Jin dynasty is not very different from stills of the Han dynasty. It resembles a colander, with a pot below to hold the fermented mash and a vessel above perforated with holes in its base. The sides of the upper vessel were cooled with water. When the lower vessel was heated, vapour rose through the holes in the bottom of the upper vessel and condensed on its cooled sides. As it ran down the sides, it collected against a rim and was drawn off through a tube to one side (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 1.2, 4.1). This was probably not a very efficient method of distillation. It would certainly have required careful control of the boiling of the mash to ensure that a high proportion of alcohol was collected without too much admixture of water. Nevertheless, strong liquors could no doubt have been obtained, especially if double distillation was used (i.e., distilling again the liquor resulting from a first distillation). A work of the early sixteenth century refers to such a process, saying that three or four cups of the liquor so obtained would make someone drunk (BCGM: 1567). It is interesting to note that Chinese texts frequently refer to distilled liquor as being 'very hot' (BCGM: 1567–8), much as Marco does. It is also recorded that, during the Ming dynasty, northerners drank distilled spirits all the year round, while southerners drank them only when the hotter months had passed (BCGM: 1567), and that northerners could get used to drinking distilled grape liquor but that southerners could not drink much of it (BCGM: 1568). It therefore seems quite possible that Marco's description of a clear, strong and heating 'wine' drunk in northern China may indeed be a reference to spirits of some kind.

Marco notes that excellent wine was produced in the area around Carachoço (Khara Khojo, Gaochang) (MP/Latham: 89; MP/Hambis: 148). The area was indeed famous for its grape wine, whether 'frozen' or not (BCGM: 1568). He also says that grapes were a speciality of Shanxi and that grape wine was made nowhere else in Cathay (MP/Latham: 165; MP/Hambis: 278). This appears to have been the case at the time. After discussing the introduction of grapes to China from the 'Western regions' (i.e. modern Xinjiang and adjacent Central Asia), where grape wine was produced, an eleventh-century Song dynasty source says: 'Now there are [grapes] in Hedong [Shanxi] and the districts near the capital [Kaifeng] . . . This wine is now also made at Taiyuan' (ZHBC: 464). During the sixteenth century, Shanxi was a well-known centre of grape production: 'People of the West and at Taiyuan and Pingyang make raisins and trade them in every direction' (BCGM: 1885). Today, Qingxu, not far from the Jinci temple outside Taiyuan, is still renowned for its grapes. Marco also records that wines were made of rice and (in Gaindu) of wheat, usually flavoured with spices (MP/Latham: 176–7, 181, 190–1, 215, 229; MP/Hambis: 298, 300, 306, 319, 321, 358, 373). Rice wine is today particularly associated with the city of Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, although it is not exclusively produced there. Before the growth in popularity of distilled spirits, however, it was drunk in much greater quantities and its production was almost universal in



Figure 10.1 Grapes, as depicted in the official Song pharmacopoeia, printed in 1249 (ZHBC).

China and neighbouring regions. As the drinking of distilled liquor spread through northern China, production of rice wine (and wine made from other grains) fell (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 3.1). It is noteworthy that, apart from the possibly distilled 'wine' that Marco describes, all his references to rice wine relate to the south, in Gaindu, Caragian, Çardandan, Caugigu, Toloman and Quinsai. According to a Chinese work written in about 660, wine was

fermented from a wide variety of grains, including gaoliang (sorghum), broomcorn (panicum) millet, foxtail (setaria) millet, and glutinous and non-glutinous rice, as well as from honey and grapes (BCGM: 1557). Many of these grains are still used for the production of alcoholic drinks in China. Gaoliang and millets, however, are now most commonly the raw materials for distilled liquor, while rice is the predominant basis for purely fermented wines. This situation is a natural result of the mainly southern production of undistilled wines, for millets and gaoliang are primarily northern crops. In Yunnan, however, wine brewed from wheat continued to be made at least until the 1940s (Goullart 1955: 41).

The revenue derived from rice wine in Quinsai and the surrounding area draws comment from Marco (MP/Latham: 229; MP/Hambis: 373). Attempts were occasionally made to ban alcoholic drinks in China, but more often they were made a source of government income. Sometimes their production was made a government monopoly, with varying degrees of strictness. Almost always they were taxed. During the Southern Song dynasty, equipment for brewing wine was monopolized by the state. People brought their own grain to the government breweries and fermented it, paying a fee according to the quantity of wine that they produced. A state wine monopoly of some kind was enforced throughout most of the period of the Song and Yuan dynasties (Xu Ganrong n.d.: 9.1). The Yuan monopoly was first established during the reign of Ögödei, and extended also to vinegar. It did indeed produce a very large income for the government. Later, the monopoly of vinegar was considerably relaxed. In 1292, the revenue from the wine monopoly in Hangzhou and the province under its administration was reported to be very much higher than that from other provinces, amounting in value to more than 270 thousand ingots (ding) of silver annually (at this period, each ingot weighed 50 Chinese ounces). It was thereupon reduced by 20 per cent (YS: zhi 43, 1604).

The typical Mongol drink, of course, was not brewed from either grain or grapes, but from milk. Usually mares' milk was used, fermented in skins. William of Rubruck gives a good description of the process of making what he calls 'cosmos', that is, kumis (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 98–9). Marco's account of 'chemis' is much briefer, perhaps because he did not spend much time on the Mongol steppe and was less familiar with the details of how it was made (MP/Latham: 99; MP/Hambis: 167). Despite the modern popularity of arxi (vodka) in Mongolia, kumis is still brewed there, and also by other nomadic, or formerly nomadic, Turco-Mongol and Turkic peoples of Central Asia. I have drunk it myself in Kazakhstan.

Among the Mongols, the status of women was somewhat ambiguous. In some ways, they had considerable prestige. The widows of Great Khans acted as regents during interregnums (Morgan 1986: 40). Marco remarks that Mongol women frequently went riding with their menfolk (MP/Latham: 197; MP/Hambis: 330). On the other hand, they were often virtually bought and sold as wives and were expected to do almost all necessary household tasks. Marco says that 'the womenfolk buy and sell and do all that is needful

for their husbands and households', while the men devote themselves to 'hunting and warfare and falconry'. Women were also expected to live harmoniously with their husband's other wives and to be absolutely faithful to him. In some versions of the text, Marco speaks in terms of great approbation of the virtues of Mongol women, contrasting them very favourably with those of Christian women of Europe. Unlike William of Rubruck, he is not condemnatory of Mongol marriage customs. He notes that a man may have as many wives as he wants, if he can support them, that they marry cousins, and that sons marry their dead father's wives, except for their own mothers. This last, William says, is a 'shameful custom' (MP/Latham: 98; MP/Hambis: 164–6; Dawson (ed.) 1955: 104).

The way in which concubines were selected for Khubilai Khan also indicates that, in Mongol society, women could be regarded more or less as chattels. Marco describes how the Great Khan sent people to inspect the unmarried women of the Onggirad tribe and select the most beautiful of them for his harem. It is clear that the women themselves had no choice in the matter (MP/Latham 122–3; MP/Hambis: 210–11). The Khans certainly did not restrict themselves solely to Onggirad women when choosing consorts (Zhao 2001: passim.). Nevertheless, there was a well-established tradition of marriage to women of the tribe, which went back to Chinggis Khan. He married an Onggirad woman called Börte or Bortei (Boertai). Her father and brother followed the Khan in his campaigns and fought well for him. Apart from rewarding them with titles, he decreed that: 'If you have daughters, they shall be empresses, if you have sons, they shall be married to princesses. This shall continue for all generations' (YS: liezhuan 1, 1810). Möngke married an Onggirad empress, and at least two of Khubilai's empresses were from the tribe (YS: liezhuan 1, 1811–12). Many other Yuan imperial consorts were also from the Onggirad (YS: liezhuan 1–3, passim.; Zhao 2001: 117–18). Marco gives the name of the tribe as 'Ungrat'. It is sometimes written with an initial consonant, as Kungurat or Khonggirat or similar. The Chinese transcriptions of the name vary (Serruys 1959: 223; Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982a: 106). 'Hongjila' and 'Guangjila' both indicate the presence of the initial consonant, while 'Wengjila' and 'Wangjila' must derive from the variant without it. 'Hongjila' occurs frequently in the official history of the Yuan dynasty. The Onggirad tribal territory was in central Inner Mongolia, though members of the tribe became scattered around the Yuan empire after the conquest (Serruys 1959: 222–3). It is interesting to wonder how Marco acquired this detailed knowledge of the system for selection of concubines for the Great Khan. There is perhaps a clue in his statement that those of the women who were initially chosen and taken to the Khan's palace, but were found to have some small flaw that disqualified them from entering his bedchamber, were kept in the palace and given as brides to men whom the Khan wished to favour, with a rich dowry (MP/Latham: 123; MP/Hambis: 211). If the Khan did indeed present Marco with a wife, she may very well have been one of these women. She would, of

course, have been able to tell Marco all about the selection process that she had personally experienced.

Marco records that the 'queen' of Mangi played a prominent role in the final defence and surrender of the city of Hangzhou, the capital of the Southern Song dynasty (MP/Latham: 202–3, MP/Hambis: 337–8). He correctly states that the forces involved in the last major campaign against Song were led by the Mongol general Bayan (which, in Chinese, sounds like 'bai yan', meaning 'hundred eyes'). After the fall of Xiangyang (see Chapter 8), the Mongols had advanced along the Han River to the Yangtze valley. Bayan had then gone to Shangdu to report to Khubilai Khan. When he returned to the war, he passed through Shandong and drew troops from the area to make a southward advance along a new line of attack, across the region south of the Huai that is now Jiangsu province. When he came to Huai'an, he unsuccessfully demanded its surrender, and then assaulted and took its southern defences. Many of the defending force were killed, but it seems that the main city was not taken and was left to be dealt with later, as Marco reports. Bayan moved on southwards via Baoying and Gaoyou. The final approach to Hangzhou was a three-pronged attack, one force sailing from the Yangtze estuary to Hangzhou Bay and the other two taking different land routes. Bayan himself travelled via Changzhou. He personally led the assault which at last led to the fall of that town, after it had held out for several months (YS: liezhuan 14, 1963–4).

At this time, the Song dynasty was in crisis. The emperor Li Zong died in 1264, after a reign of some forty years. He had allowed the direction of state affairs to fall almost entirely into the hands of corrupt ministers. He was succeeded by a nephew, who became the emperor Du Zong. His reign was short, lasting for no more than ten years, until he died of illness at the age of only about 34. One of his sons, a small child some three years old, was then placed on the throne (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 293, 297–8). The widow of Li Zong became Supreme Empress Dowager (Tai Huang Tai Hou). Despite her age and poor health, she was persuaded to act as regent (SS: liezhuan 2, 463). In fact, from the time of Li Zong, the affairs of government were directed principally by the corrupt minister Jia Sidao, who is usually blamed for most of the ills of the last years of the dynasty. In 1275, he was forced to lead an army personally against the Mongols, but was defeated and fled to Yangzhou, where he was killed (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 293). The Empress Dowager refused to allow his guilt to be recognized, however. After the fall of Changzhou, she sent messengers to the Mongols, requesting a peace settlement, but her overtures were rebuffed. A plan to move the capital from Hangzhou, which she at first rejected but was then persuaded to accept, came to nothing because of a dispute between herself and one of her ministers. After Hangzhou surrendered to the Mongols, she was permitted to remain in the city, as she was too infirm to travel to the north (SS: liezhuan 2, 463–4). The young emperor and his mother, however, were taken to the

court of Khubilai Khan. The boy was granted the title of Duke (Gong) of Yingguo and lived out his life in obscurity. His mother became a Buddhist nun (SS: liezhuan 2, 465; Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 298). Marco's 'queen' could only be the Supreme Empress Dowager, who was regent during the crucial years from 1274 until 1276. He is not very accurate regarding the 'king', whom he reported to have fled to 'the islands in the Ocean' (MP/Latham: 203; MP/Hambis: 338). His version of events is a considerable simplification of what actually happened. Two brothers of the boy emperor escaped from Hangzhou before the capitulation to the Mongols. One was declared emperor at Fuzhou, but was soon forced to flee to an island off the south-western coast of Guangdong province, where he died in 1278. The other brother was then declared emperor, taking refuge on another island, near Guangzhou. He drowned when it was attacked by Yuan forces in 1279 (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 298). This completed the overthrow of the Song dynasty.

In contrast with the comparatively free behaviour of Mongol women, Marco notes that the young women of Cathay, and likewise of Mangi, were extremely reserved and modest (MP/Latham: 196–7; MP/Hambis: 328–30). Nothing that he says in this respect is at all questionable. His observations are generally confirmed by Chinese sources (Gernet 1962: 163–4). Indeed, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, women in China were forced into even greater seclusion. Marco talks of young women walking with their mothers to make visits to temples and relatives, but in later times respectable women of the higher social strata would virtually never have been seen in public. Even prostitutes in China very rarely solicited on the streets. As Marco notes, courtesans were very numerous in Hangzhou, had many servants and lived in considerable luxury (MP/Latham: 215–16; MP/Hambis: 358–9). This, of course, only applied to the wealthier ones. Those who were most successful and famous were certainly able to amass great fortunes. Although they were not considered respectable, they were an accepted part of Hangzhou society (Gernet 1962: 96–8).

Among the other peoples of the Yuan empire, Marco encountered a variety of customs relating to sex and marriage. Travelling in the Tibetan regions of what is now western Sichuan, he found that young, unmarried women were brought by their mothers and offered as temporary partners. On leaving, each man was expected to give the girl with whom he had slept some token, that she could wear to show that she had had a lover. Those with most such tokens were most sought after as wives. After marriage, however, strict fidelity was the norm (MP/Latham: 172–3; MP/Hambis: 291–3). Such customs persisted in the area until very recently. An early twentieth-century account of the peoples of western Sichuan tells a very similar story. It relates to what are called the 'Chiarung tribes' (a name of doubtful origin, perhaps connected with that of the Qiang people), who occupied the region from Songpan southwards to Ya'an and west to the Dadu River. Their morals were reported to be 'very low', women behaving promiscuously until they became pregnant.

They then selected a husband from among their lovers, declaring him to be the father of the child. Once married, women were faithful to their husbands and divorce or separation were not accepted practice. It was also reported that tradition required that the ruler of some of the small 'states' of western Sichuan be a woman. Sometimes she held only nominal authority. Occasionally the ruler held the title of 'queen', even if he was in fact a man (Wilson 1913: i, 160, 167–8).

Many of these practices were undoubtedly connected with the traditions of matriarchy that were formerly common in this region and have, in part, survived to the present day. The Naxi people of the area near the Lugu Lake and the town of Yongning, on the Sichuan–Yunnan border, are still famous for the matriarchal nature of their society (Ci Hai Bianji Weiyuanhui (ed.) 1982a: 49–50). During the 1940s, the word 'father' was said to be unknown to these people (Rock 1947: 391). It was also reported that:

> The structure of their society was entirely matriarchal. The property was passed from mother to daughter. Each woman had several husbands and the children always cried, 'We have mama but no papa.' The mother's husbands were addressed as uncles and a husband was allowed to stay on only as long as he pleased the woman, and if he didn't, he could be thrown out without much ceremony . . . The Yungning [Yongning] country was a land of free love, and all the efforts of the . . . women were concentrated on enticing more lovers in addition to their husbands. Whenever a Tibetan caravan or other strangers were passing Yungning, these ladies went into a huddle and secretly decided where each man should stay. The lady then commanded her husbands to disappear and not to reappear until called.
>
> (Goullart 1955: 58)

This is remarkably similar to what Marco says about husbands in Gaindu leaving the house when a stranger arrived, allowing him to sleep with the wife (MP/Latham: 175–6; MP/Hambis: 296–7). Marco seems to have failed to understand that it was the women who sent their husbands away, but this must surely have been the case. In the past, practices similar to those of the Yongning area were undoubtedly more widespread. The Gaindu (Xichang) region is only some 160 kilometres (100 miles) to the east of Yongning.

Marco tells a very similar story about Camul (Hami) (MP/Latham: 88; MP/Hambis: 146–7). The customs of this region have undoubtedly changed greatly since Marco's time, not least because of the conversion of its people to Islam. He records also that, in Pem, where the people were already Muslims, if a man were absent from home for more than twenty days, then his wife could take another husband. Likewise, the men could take temporary wives wherever they travelled (MP/Latham: 82–3; MP/Hambis: 136). Traces of such practices seem to have survived into the twentieth century, when temporary marriages were common in Chinese Turkestan. In some cases, they lasted

only a ‘day or two’. Divorce papers were usually drawn up at the time of the marriage. It was apparently quite normal for women to have been married several times by the age of twenty-five. In one case, an Indian merchant from Yarkand married a young woman in Kashgar. When he returned to Yarkand, he wanted to take her with him, but the woman’s father refused to allow such a thing. Presumably he intended to marry her off several times, each time taking presents from the bridegroom. Eventually, she was carried off to Yarkand by subterfuge (Macartney 1985: 129–30). There are, of course, somewhat similar tales from medieval Europe. Sometimes travellers were offered accommodation and put to sleep in the same bed as the host and his wife, with consequences that are readily imagined (Verdon 1998: 126–7). Sometimes subterfuge resulted in a wife and daughter being ravished by temporary guests (Chaucer 1966: 56–60). These stories all date from a century or so after Marco’s time. It is not impossible that his book had some influence on the spread of such tales in popular literature. Of course, they must also have had some factual basis locally.

In Yunnan (Caragian, Uncian and Iaci), there were no physicians or doctors, according to Marco (MP/Latham: 182–3; MP/Hambis: 307–9). Illness was treated only by religio-magical practices. In at least a small part of Yunnan, the area south-east of Zhongdian and immediately west of the Yangtze River, among the Haba Mountains, this continued to be the case until recent times. The Naxi people living in this area were said to be of ‘the most primitive type’, following customs unchanged for centuries. They took ‘no medicines of any kind’, relying solely on magicians ‘to exorcize the demons of disease’ (Rock 1947: 250). The ceremonies of these magicians or shamans closely resembled those described by Marco, with the playing of musical instruments, dancing, trances and the sacrifice of animals (Goullart 1955: 187–8, 191–2; Rock 1963: 36–42). Marco records a more shocking practice among the priests or monks of Tibet and Kashmir. These, he says, would take the body of someone who had been condemned to death and cook and eat it, though they would not eat anyone who had died a natural death (MP/Latham: 110; MP/Hambis: 187–8). Both John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck say that it was common practice among the Tibetans to eat their dead. William, however, also states that they had recently stopped doing this, because of the disapproval of other peoples, although they still made drinking cups from the skulls of their deceased ancestors (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 23, 142). By Marco’s time, the ritual consumption of the dead perhaps only survived in the practice that he describes. Some commentators seem to have doubted whether this cannibalism was anything more than a myth (Olschki 1960: 287–8), but there appears to be no good reason for such doubt. A similar ritual cannibalism is reputed to have been practised among the people of Yunnan called Pu or Boa, probably to be identified with the ethnic group now called Pumi (Rock 1947: 471; Goullart 1955: 132). The Pumi were originally nomadic herdsmen on the north-eastern side of the Tibetan plateau, in modern Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces.

They migrated southwards over a period of several centuries, passing through the mountains of western Sichuan to reach their present locations in the Muli region of south-west Sichuan and nearby areas of Yunnan. They began to move into Yunnan only during the thirteenth century (Anon. 1981: 407). Even if the ritual eating of dead relatives were confined to these people, it may have been widespread in the eastern borderlands of Tibet during the Yuan dynasty. Quite possibly, however, it was also the custom among other peoples of Tibet (in the broad sense). When the Younghusband Expedition entered Tibet from British India in 1904 and explored the fort at Gyangze, they found in it a store-room filled with severed heads (Fleming 1961: 161). These must have been taken from those whose bodies had been fed to vultures, in the well-known Tibetan practice of 'sky burial', with the possible intention of making drinking cups from the skulls. Such vessels continued in use in Tibet until the present day and can still be seen in Tibetan lamaseries.

The poison that Marco refers to as being commonly used in Caragian or Yunnan (MP/Latham: 180; MP/Hambis: 304) is almost certainly the root of aconite or monkshood. This is called Wutou in Chinese, and is often the root of *Aconitum carmichaelii* Debeaux, though other species of the same genus are also used. It is very poisonous indeed. As little as 0.3 gm can cause poisoning (Zhongguo Yixue Kexueyuan Yaowu Yanjiusuo *et al.* (eds) 1959; 128, 131, 137). It has been reported to be much used by the Naxi people in Yunnan, for committing suicide as well as for more nefarious purposes. Usually the aconite root was boiled in oil. Interestingly, this poison is said to paralyse the larynx more or less instantaneously, which would prevent any possibility of torturing a confession from a criminal (Goullart 1955: 16–17, 181). A place in the Yulong or Lijiang range of mountains in Yunnan is said to be called Poison Valley, because a great deal of aconite grows there (Rock 1947: 213). The use of the crossbow with arrows tipped with aconite poison is also attested by early twentieth-century travellers in Yunnan. The crossbow was reported to be the universal weapon in western Yunnan. Quivers usually had separate compartments for plain and poisoned arrows. A scratch from a poisoned arrow was said to kill an animal as large as a bear instantaneously (Kingdon Ward 1913: 199; Handel-Mazzetti 1996: 34). Marco's apparently extraordinary statement that dog's dung was used as antidote to the poisoning is supported by Chinese sources. Dog's dung, especially that of a white dog, was reputedly effective against all poisons (BCGM: 2721). Very possibly it was this aconite poison that was often used in the murders which Marco says were committed in order to keep the spirit of a person with good qualities in a house where he lodged (MP/Latham: 180; MP/Hambis: 304). The only parallel to such a practice that seems traceable is that described by the Arab traveller Ibn Fadlan among the Bulgars of the Volga in the tenth century (Ibn Fadlan 1988: 64). Whether such beliefs and practices actually existed, or whether murderers offered this reason as better justification of their deeds than mere robbery or whatever, must remain an open question. Marco specifically states that the Great Khan

had forbidden such murders and that they had therefore ceased. Nevertheless, the murder of travellers by their hosts undoubtedly continued to occur in Yunnan from time to time, although the motives appear to have been much more conventional. During the 1930s (or thereabouts), a traveller carrying a large amount of money is reported to have died in suspicious circumstances in the inn in Lijiang where he was spending the night. However, it is clear that a suspected murder in this inn made it an inauspicious place, which people tended to avoid (Goullart 1955: 17–18).

Marco clearly either came to share the interest in wine and women that was normal among the Mongols, or took particular note of such matters to make his reports more appealing to the Great Khan. No doubt these were also details that helped to make his book popular with Europeans. Once again, no other near-contemporary traveller gives so much detail of such things. This cannot be because they were of little interest, but must be simply the result of lack of sufficient opportunity to gain knowledge of them. Marco's long residence in the Far East and his journeys around the empire of the Khan allowed him to gather the wealth of information that he was later able to include in his narrative. The fact that what he says appears to be entirely (or, at least, almost entirely) true makes it very unlikely that he could have acquired this knowledge at second hand. Such stories, passed by word of mouth, would be very liable to exaggeration and distortion.

11 Military affairs

A considerable part of Marco's book is devoted to accounts of battles, wars and other military matters. Indeed, one whole section, comprising about 15 per cent of the entire text, deals principally with the war between Khaidu and Khubilai and with conflicts involving the Il-Khans of Persia (MP/Latham: 313–43; MP/Hambis: 500–53). This section is little noticed and is commonly abridged in published versions of the book (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 456; MP/Latham: 313n). However, although it may not be written in a style that suits modern taste, it is not inconsistent with the rest of Marco's narrative. Indeed, Marco makes much of such episodes as the battle between the armies of Khubilai and Nayan (MP/Latham: 116–17; MP/Hambis: 200–2). He places his account of Nayan's rebellion right at the beginning of his lengthy description of Khubilai Khan and his court. He also gives long reports of the battles between Chinggis Khan and 'Prester John', and between the Mongols and the forces of the King of Mien (MP/Latham: 94–6, 184–7; MP/Hambis: 159–62, 310–14). Mongol military organization is described in detail (MP/Latham: 99–101; MP/Hambis: 167–71). Marco frequently notes that military equipment is manufactured at a certain place, or that certain peoples are good soldiers, cowards or whatever. Thus, at Xuandezhou (Xuanhua), at Quengianfu (Xi'an) and at Yangzhou, he records the manufacture of equipment for armies. He particularly mentions the production at Yangzhou of saddlery for horses, which would of course have been very important for the Mongol cavalry (MP/Latham: 106, 168, 206; MP/Hambis: 181, 285, 344). The people of Cotan, he says, are not good soldiers, but (in some versions of the text) cowards. Likewise, he states that the people of Mangi would never have been conquered by the Mongols if they had been trained as warriors (MP/Latham: 82, 202; MP/Hambis: 136, 336). On the other hand, the people of Lingiu or Liucheng, despite being heavily engaged in commerce and industry, are also skilful men-at-arms (MP/Latham: 200; MP/Hambis: 333).

It is very noticeable, too, that the great majority of those personages of the Yuan empire whom Marco names in the book, other than Khans and other Mongol royalty, are soldiers, or at least are involved in some kind of military activity. It has been remarked that Marco mentions only three Chinese by name (Wood 1995: 56). All three were soldiers. One of them is

Li Tan, a general who at first served the Mongols but later rose in rebellion and defected to the Southern Song dynasty (see Chapter 8). Another is Wang Zhu (Vanchu), the captain of a thousand soldiers at Yidu (in modern Shandong province), who led the successful plot to assassinate the corrupt minister Ahmad (MP/Latham: 132–4; MP/Hambis: 221–3). Finally, there is Fan Wenhu (Vonsamcin), a general of the Southern Song empire who went over to the Mongols in 1275 and was appointed one of the commanders of the expedition against Japan in 1281. The other leader of this expedition was the Mongol general Arakhan (Alahan), also mentioned by Marco (MP/Latham: 244; MP/Hambis: 398). Other Yuan generals and commanders whom Marco names are Nayan the rebel, Kogatai, Ajul, Nescradin or Nasir al-Din, Mongatai or Nanggiadai, Bayan and Sögätü. Apart from these, the only names that he records are those of Çulficar or Zurficar, who supervised the mining of asbestos and other minerals (MP/Latham: 89; MP/Hambis: 150), the corrupt minister Acmat or Ahmad (MP/Latham: 132–4; MP/Hambis: 221–3), Marsarchis or Mar Sargis (or Mar Sergius), who governed Zhenjiang and had Nestorian Christian churches built there (MP/Latham: 211; MP/Hambis: 351) and the brothers Bayan and Mingan, who were responsible for the hounds for the Khan's hunts (MP/Latham: 142; MP/Hambis 236). It can be seen that those involved in military affairs considerably outnumber others.

The affair of Ahmad's assassination is recounted at length (MP/Latham: 131–5; MP/Hambis: 220–4). Ahmad (Ahema) was a Muslim, said to have come from a town near modern Tashkent (Wood 1995: 58), though his exact origins are not recorded in Chinese sources. He rose to high office as early as 1263 and was placed in charge of the Central Secretariat in the following year, concurrently holding other posts (YS: liezhuan 92, 2892–3). Marco's account of his activities and assassination is in reasonably close agreement with the records of the official history of the Yuan dynasty. Marco gives a little more detail of Ahmad's crimes, especially as regards his lechery. There are problems with the names of those whom Marco says were involved in the affair. His Vanchu must surely be Wang Zhu, who is recorded to have been the main instigator of the plot (YS: benji 12, 158; liezhuan 92, 2896). His Cenchu, however, seems not to be a name but rather the rank of Qianhu, commander of a thousand. There is certainly some confusion here. The Kogatai whom Marco says killed Vanchu and seized Cenchu cannot be reliably identified. It is also recorded that Wang Zhu allowed himself to be arrested and was executed a few days later, not killed immediately after the assassination, as Marco says. Otherwise, Marco's account agrees very well with the official dynastic history. According to both, the conspirators took advantage of the absence of Khubilai and the Crown Prince at Shangdu to make their move against Ahmad. They pretended that the Crown Prince had returned unexpectedly to Dadu at night, summoned Ahmad to the Prince's presence and then assassinated him. The conspirators against Ahmad were killed before an investigation revealed Ahmad's wrongdoings. When Khubilai

discovered the extent of Ahmad's crimes, he had his body exhumed and cast into the street to be eaten by dogs. The wealth that he had accumulated was confiscated. Several of Ahmad's sons were also found to have committed great crimes and were executed. At least some of them were flayed alive (YS: benji 12, 158–64; liezhuan 92, 2896–7). The agreement is so close that Marco's claim to have been present at the time must surely be accepted (MP/Latham: 135; MP/Hambis: 224). It may be that Marco was not actually in Dadu when Ahmad was assassinated, but was then perhaps in Shangdu with Khubilai's court. This would explain the inaccuracies in the personal names that he gives. He may well have returned to Dadu after the conspirators had been executed and been present during the later part of the affair, so that he was indeed a personal witness of such things as the exhumation of Ahmad's body. It must also be possible that he relied solely on memory for his version of events and failed to recall all the details correctly. Marco gives no date for this affair. The assassination took place late in the third month, by the Chinese lunar calendar, of the year equivalent to 1282. Ahmad's eldest and second sons were executed at Yangzhou in the tenth month and the major investigations into Ahmad's crimes were concluded the following month (YS: benji 12, 164). Once again, Marco shows detailed and generally accurate knowledge of events that occurred exactly during the period when he claimed to be in China.

There has been considerable confusion in previous commentators' criticisms of Marco's account of the Mongol expedition against Japan (Çipingu or Cipangu). The very fact that Marco mentions Japan at all is highly significant, for the existence of this island country off the eastern coast of Asia seems to have been entirely unknown anywhere west of Central Asia before Marco's time. It is not mentioned again in European literature until the sixteenth century (Larner 1999: 63). Marco has been criticized for exaggerating the magnificence of the Japanese Imperial palace, with its roof and floors of gold (MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 256n; Olschki 1960: 161–2). There is undoubtedly some exaggeration in this description. It must surely be based on hearsay, for it is very unlikely that Marco personally visited Japan. Nevertheless, it is a fact that gold, gold-dust and pearls (also mentioned by Marco) were major imports into China from Japan during the Song dynasty (Shiba 1970: 49).

According to Marco, the Mongol invasion of Japan was led by two 'barons' called Abacan or Abakan and Vonsamcin (MP/Latham: 244–6; MP/Hambis: 398–401). This expedition took place in 1281. There had already been an earlier, unsuccessful attack, on a much smaller scale, in 1274. Abacan can readily be identified with Arakhan (Alahan). The official history of the Yuan dynasty states that he and Fan Wenhu were placed in charge of the invasion force (YS: benji 11, 145). Marco's name 'Vonsamcin' is probably derived from Fan Canzheng. Canzheng was a rank held by Fan Wenhu (Wood 1995: 59). Fan had been a general of the Southern Song empire, who surrendered to the Mongols under Ajul at Anqing in 1275. He was immediately appointed to high office under the Yuan dynasty (YS: liezhuan 14, 1962). It has been

said that Arakhan fell ill, or even died, before the invasion was mounted and that he therefore did not take part in it (Wood 1995: 59; MP/Hambis: 398n). This is not supported by Chinese records. According to the biography of Arakhan in the official history of the Yuan dynasty, he 'led a Mongol army of 400 [probably an error for 140] thousand to attack Japan . . . and died in the army' (YS: liezhuan 16, 1991). His illness is recorded in a later Chinese source, but it is clear that he was already in, or on the way to, Japan when he became ill and that his replacement, Atahai (Adaha), never left the coast of China. Fan Wenhu returned to Korea with a remnant of the army before Atahai was ready to sail (XZT: juan 185, 70–1). The ships of the Mongol invasion force suffered severely in a typhoon (the original kamikaze, or 'divine wind'). Fan Wenhu then sailed away from Japan with part of the Mongol army, leaving Arakhan and many of the soldiers stranded on one of the Japanese islands. They were eventually made prisoners by the Japanese. Some were enslaved, but most were executed. Just three were allowed to return to China to carry the news of the disaster (XZT: juan 185, 71; MP/Yule-Cordier: ii, 260n). Fan Wenhu seems to have suffered disgrace as a result of this fiasco, but he was not executed. In 1284, he was again given a high appointment (YS: benji 13, 179–80). He appears for the last time in Chinese records three years later. During the campaign against Nayan, he commanded a mere 500 soldiers holding a fortified position (YS: benji 14, 201). Marco's account of the campaign against Japan is inaccurate in a number of respects, but he has the main facts generally correct (MP/Latham: 244–6; MP/Hambis: 398–402). The date given in the book is wrong, but it is clearly corrupt, for it varies considerably between manuscripts, from 1264 to 1289 (MP/Marsden: 327n). Marco's statement that the two generals in command of the expedition did not like each other and failed to co-operate is interesting and is very likely to be true. Arakhan was a Mongol, whose ancestors had fought under Chinggis Khan and subsequent Mongol rulers, and who had himself taken part in the campaigns against the Southern Song dynasty from the 1250s onwards (YS: liezhuan 16, 1991). It is entirely credible that he might have felt animosity towards Fan Wenhu, a Chinese and a former general of the Southern Song empire, who had only surrendered to the Mongols as recently as 1275.

Nayan was a descendant of Chinggis Khan's younger brother. He was a prince with an appanage in the region that later came to be called Manchuria. When Khaidu disputed the title of Great Khan with Khubilai, Nayan sided with Khaidu. In 1287, he rose in rebellion against Khubilai Khan, who personally led an army against him. He was defeated and killed (Nanjing University, History Department (ed.) 1982: 334; YS: benji 14, 201–2). Marco gives considerably more detail of this rebellion and its suppression than does the official history of the Yuan dynasty (MP/Latham: 114–18; MP/Hambis: 196–203). There is nothing in his account that conflicts with the Chinese records, except that his date is slightly out. He gives 1286, although this may well be corrupt, as is so often the case with dates in the book

(MP/Latham: 113; MP/Hambis: 196). It is remarkable that Khubilai Khan himself led the army that defeated Nayan. Both Marco and the official dynastic history note this fact. The rebellion was suppressed very rapidly, in just a couple of months. Marco comments that Khubilai decided to act quickly in order to forestall any possibility of Nayan joining forces with Khaidu, which is entirely credible.

Both Ajul and Nanggiadai (Mongatai) were important Mongol generals who have already been mentioned above. Both have biographies in the official history of the Yuan dynasty. Marco mentions them only in connection with the rebellion of Li Tan (see Chapter 8 above), but Ajul in particular played a major role in other campaigns, from the Mongol invasion of Yunnan to the subjugation of the Southern Song empire. He died of illness in Gaochang at the age of only about 54, in 1286 (YS: liezhuan 15, 1972–5). As well as taking part in the suppression of Li Tan's rebellion, Nanggiadai played a role in the defeat of Arigh Böke. He was involved in the siege and capture of Xiangyang, under the command of Ajul. After the surrender of Xiangyang, he was promoted to the rank of Qianhu (commander of a thousand). He then followed Bayan in the final campaigns against the Southern Song dynasty and played a prominent part in accepting the surrender of Hangzhou. He accompanied Song officials in their journey northwards to the court of Khubilai Khan and was promoted to the rank of general and made a darughachi. He continued to rise in rank, becoming an assistant Wanhu (commander of ten thousand). He was ordered to join in the attack on Japan, but was too late to take any part in this, returning before reaching the Japanese islands. Subsequently, he was appointed to high rank in the provincial government of Yunnan, where he campaigned against the Gold Teeth and participated in the attack on Mien. He fell ill and was recalled to Dadu. After the death of Khubilai, he joined the final campaign against Khaidu and fought with great distinction. He held high office under four emperors, finally becoming governor of the Henan Jiangbei province, with a 'Golden Tiger' tablet of command. He died in office (YS: liezhuan 18, 2018–19). His connection with the government of Yunnan and the invasion of Mien is interesting. He may well have been in Yunnan during Marco's second visit to the province, so that Marco may then have become personally acquainted with him. They might also have met in Mien. Perhaps Marco heard about his participation in the fighting against Li Tan from Nanggiadai himself. This may explain why he is mentioned in connection with the suppression of Li Tan's revolt, despite the fact that he cannot have held very high rank at the time. No doubt many of these Mongol soldiers had a tendency to exaggerate their own roles in the various campaigns in which they had taken part.

The great general Bayan was slightly younger than Ajul, but became even more prominent, leading the final campaigns against Southern Song, as Marco correctly states (MP/Latham: 202–3, 211, 228; MP/Hambis: 337–8, 352–3, 371). He outlived Khubilai Khan by a short time, dying in 1295

at the age of about 59 (YS: liezhuan 14, 1958–71). Marco calls him 'Baian Cingsan' (or 'Bayan Chincsan'). He held the title of Chengxiang (in Mongolian, Chingsang), equivalent to something like Secretary of State, from as early as 1265 and was one of the most prominent Mongol generals of the reign of Khubilai Khan. Nasir al-Din (Nasulading) was the eldest son of Sa'id Ajall Shams al-Din (see Chapter 7) and followed his father in holding high office in the government of Yunnan. He led campaigns to subjugate various peoples of the province, including the Gold Teeth, and also commanded the invasion of Mien and took part in fighting in Annam. He was rewarded with titles and gifts of money for his prowess. In 1291, he was moved to the government of Shaanxi province, but died of illness the following year (YS: liezhuan 12, 1936). He did not, in fact, command the Mongol army that defeated the invasion by the King of Mien in 1277, as Marco states (MP/Latham: 185; MP/Hambis: 310). He did, however, lead the attack on Mien immediately afterwards that followed up the defeat of the King's army (see Chapter 7).

Sögätü (Suodu) is mentioned by Marco as leader of the Mongol invasion of Champa, a kingdom which was situated to the south of Annam, in what is today central and southern Vietnam (MP/Latham: 249; MP/Hambis: 407). His date for this invasion again varies between manuscripts of the book and is clearly corrupt (MP/Marsden: 332n). It was in 1282 that Sögätü sailed from Guangzhou with one thousand ships to attack Champa (YS: benji 12, 160; liezhuan 16, 1995). Three years earlier, he had been among Mongol ambassadors to that country, who had sought its submission (YS: liezhuan 97, 2964). The invasion of 1282 was successful, but Champa submitted unwillingly. Its people remained generally hostile to the Mongols. In 1284, the King of Champa sent tribute of elephants and other goods to Khubilai Khan (YS: benji, 178–9). In the same year, Sögätü, who had remained in Champa after 1282, was ordered to invade Annam in support of a Mongol army attacking from the north. He was subsequently killed fighting in Annam, after the main Mongol force withdrew without his knowledge (YS: liezhuan 16, 1995–6). It is very difficult to be sure when Marco may have been in Champa. The date for this visit is again obviously corrupt, differing from manuscript to manuscript (MP/Latham: 250; MP/Hambis: 408). Some time between 1282 and 1289 is most likely. Champa disappears from Yuan records after the latter date.

This visit to Champa, a country of very doubtful loyalty to the Great Khan, is not untypical of Marco's activities in the Yuan empire. It has already been suggested that he must have visited Yunnan at least twice and entered Mien shortly after its conquest and Annam at a period when fighting was still going on there (see Chapter 7). Yunnan itself remained unsettled for many years. In 1278, the provincial government reported that there were still many areas within its borders that had not submitted, so that further military action was necessary (YS: zhi 46, 1684). Marco passed through the country of the Tulaman, some of whom rose in revolt in 1284 (see

Chapter 7). It must be very likely that his visits to all these places, at times when military action had recently been concluded or was still in progress, were not unconnected with such action. Taken with Marco's obvious interest in military affairs, this suggests that his main activities in the service of the Great Khan were probably military. It has been noted previously that Marco shows little or no interest in political affairs but a great deal in military matters. It has even been suggested that he may have participated in 'martial operations' (Olschki 1960: 331–2). There is, however, little or nothing in the book which indicates his personal involvement in any fighting. His descriptions of battles may well have come to him from acquaintances who had actually taken part in them.

Marco's journeys through eastern China would have been undertaken either on the way to places such as Champa and India, when he would probably have taken ship at Quanzhou (Çaiton), or perhaps on missions connected with the manufacture of military equipment. If he really did spend three years (or, if this is another case of inclusive reckoning, two years) in some position of authority in Yangzhou, then this may have been connected with the administration of the armaments industry there. This would explain why it has not proved possible to identify his name in connection with the civil administration of the city. Another possible reason is suggested by Ramusio's version of the book, which states that Marco held the post in the place of the person who had actually been appointed to it (MP/Latham: 206n; MP/Hambis: 343–4). In itself, this would be sufficient reason for the absence of his name from the records. It must be borne in mind, however, that during the period of Mongol rule in China, the distinction between military and civil offices was far from clear-cut. Officials often held both military and civil responsibilities concurrently and could move easily between civil and military posts (De Rachewiltz 1983: 303–4n). Thus, it may be that Marco was involved to some extent in civil as well as military matters. Nevertheless, it is evident from his book that he took great interest in all things military and it must be likely that his primary activities in the Yuan empire accorded with this.

There is other evidence that he may have held a military position under Khubilai Khan. The inventory of his possessions, drawn up after his death, includes 'the silver belt of a Tartar knight' (Olschki 1960: 105; Larner 1999: 45). It has been suggested that he must have worn this 'as a sign of his rank', though without any attempt to ascertain what that rank may have been (Olschki 1960: 106). It is certainly unlikely that he could have acquired such a belt other than by being awarded it by the Khan. Such items, because they were badges of rank, were not freely given away or sold. It can be assumed that the description of the belt as that of a Tartar knight came from Marco himself, for the inventory includes a lady's headdress described by its Mongolian name as well as Oriental names for other objects. These foreign terms must have been learned from Marco by whoever drew up the inventory, presumably a member of his family (Olschki 1960: 106n). This very probably

indicates, therefore, that Marco was himself a 'Tartar knight'. This raises the question of what exactly this meant. There are only a few uses of the word 'knight' (French 'chevalier') in Marco's book (there is also some divergence between versions and translations of the text regarding its use). One is in describing the court of the King of Maabar (in India), when Marco uses this word for the loyal retainers of the King who, after enjoying great privilege and authority during his lifetime, throw themselves onto his funeral pyre to be burnt with him after his death (MP/Hambis: 429; MP/Marsden: 355). Here he clearly uses the word in the sense of a man closely bound and loyally devoted to a lord or ruler, who himself is granted high status beneath his lord. It is also used, apparently in a similar sense, of the close retainers of Khubilai Khan, his bodyguard or keshigten (kasitan, quesitan) (MP/Latham: 135; MP/Hambis: 224, 229; MP/Marsden: 181). This is the only usage of the word in Marco's descriptions of the Mongols and of Khubilai Khan and his court. The conclusion to be drawn is surely that Marco was very probably one of the keshigten. He says that the Great Khan gave them belts of gold (or, in different versions of the text, of fine leather adorned with gold and silver thread) which were worn for special festivals. Probably the silver belt was for normal, everyday use, to be worn at all other times. Marco would have worn it when leaving China with the Mongol princess, to accompany her to Persia, and must then have returned to Venice with it. Its significance to him is proved by the fact that he kept it until he died.

The keshig originated during the time of Chinggis Khan. It was at first quite small, consisting of only some 70 day guards and 80 night guards, but it grew rapidly, both in numbers and in functions. It was the keshig that became the core of the early Mongol administrative system. By 1206, it already numbered 10,000 men. Almost from the very beginning, the keshig included many non-Mongols. Members of the keshig outranked virtually all other officers in the Mongol armies, even a commander of a thousand. Membership was a high honour and undoubtedly involved great personal loyalty to the Great Khan (Morgan 1986: 90; Christian 1998: 396). During the reign of Chinggis Khan, the keshig (qiexue) was divided into four, respectively commanded by Mukhali (Muhuali), Boghorchu (Boerzhu), Borghul (Boerhu) and Chormaghun (Chilaowen). Since Borghul died early, Chinggis Khan himself led his section of the keshig. The descendants of these four commanders frequently inherited their positions, as long as the Khan had confidence in them. The keshigten continued to grow in numbers after the death of Chinggis Khan, so that eventually there were 14,000 of them. The four divisions of the keshig were on duty in succession for three days at a time. They were well paid, and because of the constant increase in their numbers, the disbursements to them became a major drain on state resources (YS: zhi 47, 1689–90). Marco's description of the keshig accords very well with these facts (MP/Latham: 135; MP/Hambis: 224–5). He says that there were 12,000 keshigten, which must at least be very close to the actual number during the reign of Khubilai Khan. He also notes the division

of the keshig into four, each with its own commander, and says that each of the four groups of three thousand men was on duty, in turn, for three days at a time. His description of the magnificent apparel given to the keshigten by the Khan, to be worn during great festivals at court, does not seem to be confirmed by Chinese sources, but is entirely credible (MP/Latham: 140–1; MP/Hambis: 229).

It is interesting to note that Marco specifically refers to members of the keshig leaving their duties in the palace on the Khan's business (MP/Latham: 135; MP/Hambis: 225). If Marco was himself a keshigten, then he was probably speaking from personal experience. Members of the keshig were frequently appointed to a variety of offices. There are many examples in the official history of the Yuan dynasty. Only a couple will be cited here. At the age of 16 (probably only 15 by Western reckoning), He Sheng entered the Khan's bodyguard. Khubilai Khan placed much confidence in him. He is reported to have warmed the Khan's feet with his own body during a journey by night after the defeat of Nayan. In 1291, he was given an important appointment in the Central Secretariat. After his father was given leave to retire due to his advanced age, he inherited the office of Vice-regent (Liushou) of Shangdu. Later, he was appointed to other important positions (YS: liezhuan 66, 2617). Dada'a'er was promoted from being a member of the bodyguard to the rank of general and also became a darughachi (YS: liezhuan 22, 2089). It would be easy to cite several other similar cases. The keshig was a very important institution in the Mongol empire. If Marco was indeed a keshigten, then this would fully justify his claim to have held a place of honour at the court of Khubilai Khan. It would also accord very well with him being employed by the Khan on missions around the empire and even beyond its borders, especially if those missions were indeed mainly military in nature.

The intense loyalty to the Great Khan displayed by Marco in the book is also very appropriate for a keshigten. Marco frequently refers to the Khan in terms little short of adulation. He is described as the richest and most powerful ruler who had ever existed in all the world. His great valour and prowess are highly praised. In Ramusio's version of the book, he is said to have been the wisest and most courageous of all Mongol commanders in battle (MP/Latham: 113; MP/Hambis: 195–6; MP/Marsden: 153). Marco was well aware that the Mongols had taken control of China by force of arms and had 'no legal right' to rule there (MP/Latham: 133; MP/Hambis: 222). He also realized that there was resentment against the conquering Mongols, at least in southern China (MP/Latham: 219–20; MP/Hambis: 361). Nor does he hesitate to describe the large garrisons that the Khan maintained throughout the empire to guard against rebellion (MP/Latham: 221–3; MP/Hambis: 364, 366–7). Yet all this does not seem in any way to have diminished the great respect that he felt for Khubilai Khan and his high regard for the Khan's qualities. Even his physical appearance is described in very complimentary terms (MP/Latham: 121–2: MP/Hambis: 209). Marco

also claims (in Ramusio's version of the book) that Khubilai Khan was much inclined to become a Christian, and only failed to do so because the Christians in his empire (Nestorians) were ignorant and could not perform marvels such as those worked by the adepts of other religions (MP/Latham: 119–20; MP/Hambis: 205–6). Possibly this was added to make his highly laudatory account of Khubilai Khan more acceptable to contemporary Europeans, but it may also reflect a certain amount of wishful thinking on his part, that his great hero should have really desired to share Marco's own religious beliefs.

If Marco was a member of Khubilai Khan's keshig, and was sent on military missions around the Yuan empire, why does he not tell his readers so? A highly plausible reason for his silence about being a keshigten can be found in the book itself. Marco describes how, on great feast-days at the Khan's court, all those assembled (including the Khan's 'barons and knights', among them, presumably, the keshigten) bow down and 'worship him as if he were a god' (MP/Latham: 139–40; MP/Hambis: 231–2). It would have been dangerous, in the Europe of his time, for Marco to have admitted to having done such a thing himself. It would have been considered blasphemous. By contrast with the considerable religious tolerance in the Yuan empire, Catholic Europe was highly intolerant of any divergence from orthodoxy. As for Marco's failure to specify the nature of his missions on behalf of Khubilai Khan, this was perhaps because he felt obliged by his loyalty to the Khan to keep their purpose secret. If they were indeed principally military, there may well have been some secrecy about them. As a loyal servant of the Great Khan, even after his return to Venice, Marco may well have preferred to maintain silence about affairs which he may have felt that it was his duty not to disclose.

12 A unique life and legacy

The period of Marco Polo's residence in the empire of the Great Khan was a very remarkable one, a time of great upheaval throughout most of Asia. Shortly after he arrived in the Far East, the Mongols completed their conquest of China. This was the first time ever that the entire Chinese empire had fallen to 'barbarian' invaders. Moreover, unlike most other conquerors of China, the Mongols imposed on the Chinese a considerable degree of completely foreign control. However resistant such invaders as the Khitans and the Jurchens had been to becoming sinicized themselves, they had of necessity relied on Chinese methods of administration to govern their conquered territories in China. They had principally used Chinese officials to run the government for them, for they had had no contact with other peoples experienced in organizing efficient systems of government suitable for a large, populous and principally agricultural empire. The Mongols, however, overran a great part of Central Asia before conquering China. They brought into China large numbers of non-Chinese, who held many of the highest posts of government. Major changes were made to the traditional structure of administration. The important position of darughachi, for example, was an entirely Mongol creation, as is clearly shown by the fact that the title is normally transcribed into Chinese as 'daluhuachi' in the official history of the Yuan dynasty. There was no equivalent pre-existent Chinese title. It was very common for a darughachi to be a Mongol or a Turk (often a Uighur) rather than a Chinese (Allsen 1983: 267; De Rachewiltz 1983: 285, 290). The division of the empire into about a dozen large provinces was also a Mongol innovation. During the early period of the Mongol conquests, up to the reign of Khubilai Khan, Chinese influence on the administration of the empire was quite slight and mainly exercised at second hand, through sinicized non-Chinese such as the Khitan, Yelü Chucai. It was mainly during the reigns of Khubilai and later Khans that the system of government of the Yuan empire began to settle into a more traditionally Chinese form. Despite the absorption of Chinese influences, however, it never entirely lost many distinctively Mongol characteristics. The single fact that the old Chinese system of examination for the bureaucracy was not reinstated until 1315 (Needham 1954: 142; YS: benji 25, 392) indicates how very different the

government of China was under the Mongols. Even after 1315, many officials were appointed without taking the examinations and Mongols and other non-Chinese were given preferential treatment (YS: zhi 31, 1336–7; Serruys 1959: 138). The privileged position of non-Chinese in the administrative hierarchy was maintained throughout the period of the dynasty. During the last years of Mongol rule in China, many Mongol and other non-Chinese officials remained unable to write their own names in Chinese fashion and used seals as signatures instead (Serruys 1959: 137). The Yuan dynasty was very much a foreign government in China and retained many distinctively non-Chinese features right to the end.

It was, indeed, the fact that the Mongols were foreign conquerors, heavily reliant on other foreigners to assist them in the control and administration of their empire, that enabled the Polos to gain a warm reception at the court of Khubilai Khan and to reside for so long in his domains. It is arguable that it could only have been during the reign of Khubilai that their experiences would have been possible. Earlier Khans seem to have been less welcoming of Europeans, to judge by the receptions accorded to John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck. John, who was in Mongolia when Güyüg was proclaimed Khan in 1246, complained that the Mongols were arrogant and treated other peoples badly, even if they were of high rank. Despite his request to be allowed to remain in Mongolia to preach Christianity, William was dismissed by Möngke Khan, Khubilai's elder brother and predecessor as Great Khan, and sent back to Europe (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 15, 196–7). After Khubilai, who was on the throne for 35 years, reigns were generally short. Only his successor and grandson ruled for as long as 13 years, until the accession of the last Yuan emperor. It would have been impossible during this period for anyone to enjoy the favour of a single Khan, as Marco apparently did, for as long as 17 or 18 years. Despite its length, the reign of the last Khan to rule as emperor of China was a period of great instability, marked by rebellions, floods and serious outbreaks of disease (Morgan 1986: 133). The Yuan dynasty was, in fact, in severe decline after about 1315. Khubilai Khan's reign was unique in Chinese history. It was an extraordinary period when, for the first time for centuries, China was reunited under a single government, but a foreign government imposed by force of arms. The China in which Marco lived was not China as it was at any other time. It was part of the Mongol empire, not long conquered. It was very different from China of the Song dynasty or of the Ming dynasty, or even of the late Yuan dynasty. China has never been unchanging, as the Chinese have often tried to claim and Westerners seem frequently to have believed. In this sense, Marco did not go to 'China': at least, he went to a very different China from any that existed before or after his time. Indeed, by the latter half of the Ming dynasty, when Europeans arrived in their own ships on the coast of south-east China, it seemed so different from Marco's Mangi that they did not realize that it was the same place. They still expected to find a Mongol Great Khan ruling from a city called Khanbalikh. They

completely failed to comprehend that he had been replaced by the Chinese Ming Emperor, with his throne in the same city, but renamed Beijing. Maps were drawn in Europe that showed China to the south of Mangi, with Cathay further north still. Khanbalikh or Cambaluc was treated as an entirely different place from Beijing or Peking (Larner 1999: 168–9).

It might be argued that it was during the reign of Khubilai Khan that China began to be recreated. Before the Mongol conquest, Cathay, Mangi and Tangut had been different countries. They did not immediately become homogeneously 'Chinese'. Visitors to the Far East during the period from about 1240 until 1350 do not talk of China as if it were a single, unified country. Almost without exception, they refer to north China as 'Cathay' and south China as 'Manzi' (or variants of these names). Even Ibn Battuta, who was in China as late as about 1346, speaks of south China as 'Sin' (China) and of the north as 'Khitha' or 'Kitha' (Cathay) (Ibn Battuta 1982: 318, 340). After long occupation by the Jurchens and, in the area around Beijing, the Khitans, north China had become a very different region from the south. Song envoys to the Liao and Jin courts and, later, to the Mongols often found that the north was a strange and difficult place. They complained about the music there and even more about the food and the wine. Jin wine was considered dreadful and the food more or less inedible. One envoy to the Liao was presented with ten sheep and ten marmots from the steppes, but had no idea what to do with them and released them! The marmots were a delicacy for the Khitans (Franke 1983: 135–7). Regional differences have, of course, persisted in China, but they must certainly have been much more extreme during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The distinctive character of Mongol rule in China, its very 'foreign' style, makes understanding the history of the period exceptionally difficult. This is perhaps even more the case for Chinese scholars than for Western students of Chinese history, for Chinese are usually burdened by all kinds of preconceptions about the history of their own country that do not hold good for the Mongol period. The situation is not helped by the fact that sources for the history of the Yuan dynasty are notoriously poor. One of Marco's greatest critics has referred to 'voluminous Chinese documents relating to the period' (Wood 1995: 132), but this is not really correct. The official history of the Yuan dynasty, compiled in a great hurry early in the Ming dynasty, has generally been considered among the worst, if not the worst, of all the dynastic histories. Work to supplement it began centuries ago. As early as 1699, Shao Yuanping completed his *Yuan Shi Lei Bian*. He was followed by various other scholars. Qian Daxin (1728–1804) completed two important works, the *Yuan Shi Shizu Biao* and the *Yuan Shi Yiwen Zhi*. They dealt respectively with Mongol clan and family names and with literature of the Yuan period. Both were finished in 1791. Qian also attempted completely to rewrite the official dynastic history, but his *Yuan Shi Gao* seems to have remained incomplete and was never published. During the years 1796 to 1800, Wang Huizu produced a work entitled *Yuan Shi Ben Zheng*, in

which he attempted to reconcile discrepancies in the official dynastic history. It was supplemented by one of his sons and printed in 1802 and 1891. Wei Yuan (1794–1856) wrote a *Yuan Shi Xin Bian*, which remained unfinished at the time of his death and was not printed until 1905. It drew heavily on the *Yuan Shi Lei Bian* and incorporated the *Yuan Shi Shizu Biao* and the *Yuan Shi Yiwen Zhi*. Hong Jun (1840–93), who was Chinese minister in Germany (also accredited to Russia, Austria and Holland) from 1887 until 1890, compiled a *Yuan Shi Yiwen Zhengbu*, which supplemented the official history using mainly non-Chinese sources. It was not quite completed before he died, but some of his family and friends continued his work and it was printed in 1897 (Hummel (ed.) 1943: 154, 360–1, 825, 851). Finally, during the Republican period in China, the *Xin Yuan Shi* (*New History of the Yuan Dynasty*) was compiled and published. None of these works can, however, compensate for the shortcomings which obviously existed in the original, long-lost archives of the Yuan dynasty. The Mongols were clearly not too concerned about keeping complete and accurate historical records, especially during the period before the reign of Khubilai Khan.

One notable way in which the Yuan records appear defective is that they almost completely fail to mention any European visitors to Mongolia and China, even official emissaries of the Pope. There is nothing in them about John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck or even John of Montecorvino, who lived in Khanbalikh for some thirty years from the end of 1293. In 1307 he was appointed the first Archbishop of Khanbalikh (Dawson (ed.) 1955: xxxi–xxxiii; Larner 1999: 120–1). A subsequent Papal envoy, Giovanni Marignolli, who reached Khanbalikh in 1342 and spent about five years there, has the great distinction of having achieved some kind of mention in the official dynastic history (Dawson (ed.) 1955: xxxiii–xxxiv). He is not, however, mentioned by name, as has sometimes been claimed (Wood 1995: 16). Indeed, it was not the embassy as such that attracted attention, but one of the gifts that Giovanni had brought for the Khan. This was a European war-horse, similar to a modern cart-horse, which clearly astonished the Mongols by its sheer size. The complete entry in the official history is as follows: ‘In this month [the seventh month of the year equivalent to 1342], the country of the Franks (Fulang) presented as tribute a strange horse. It was one zhang [ten Chinese feet] one foot three inches long and six feet four inches tall. Its body was pure black, with the two hind feet entirely white’ (YS: benji 40, 598–9). This is apparently all the notice that Europeans merited in the official dynastic records. There is also mention of a possible embassy from northern Europe, perhaps from Novgorod, in a court diary, referring to the year 1261, but that is all (Morgan 1986: 131; Wood 1995: 102). It is therefore not surprising that no mention has yet been found in any Chinese or Mongol source of Niccolò and Maffeo Polo. Even as emissaries from the Great Khan to the Pope, they would scarcely have been worthy of comment.

The fact that no mention of Marco has yet been identified in any Yuan dynasty source is a little less explicable. Marco was apparently a long time

in the service of Khubilai Khan. It surely might be expected that his name should appear somewhere in the records. There are, however, several good reasons for its apparent absence. One is that no one has any idea what name they should look for. Searches have usually concentrated on finding some version of the name 'Polo' (Wood 1995: 135–6). It is, however, highly unlikely that Marco would have used this surname as his usual name while in the Yuan empire (Olschki 1960: 125). Surnames were of little importance in Europe at the time. Indeed, most Europeans had no family names at this period. Apart from the Polos, the Europeans who visited Mongolia and China during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were mostly known simply by their personal name and the place that they came from. Thus, there are John of Plano Carpini (a place near Perugia), William of Rubruck (in Flanders), Odoric of Pordenone, and so on. This was common practice in the Europe of the period. Surnames (in the modern sense) only became important two or three centuries later. Attempts have also been made to find versions of 'Marco' in the Chinese records (Wood 1995: 136), but these seem to have assumed direct transcription of the name into Chinese. This would not have been the case, however. Marco would have taken a Mongol, Turkic or possibly Persian name, which would subsequently have been transcribed into Chinese characters. He may very well have used a name that did not derive in any way from his European name and bore no resemblance to it. The Khan might have conferred a Mongol name on him, as he is known to have done on some Chinese (Wood 1995: 59). Thus, it is perfectly possible that Marco is, in fact, mentioned in the official history of the Yuan dynasty, or some other Chinese source, but that the name by which he is called cannot be identified. Contrary to what has often been said, however, Marco does not claim any very exalted position for himself in the Yuan empire. He does not say that he was a high-ranking minister, or a darughachi, or a commander of ten thousand or even of one thousand. He merely claims to have been used by the Khan as some kind of emissary and to have held a position of some honour. If he was a keshigten, then such claims would be entirely justified. There were, however, ten thousand keshigten at the time of Chinggis Khan and as many as fourteen thousand later. During the whole period of the Mongol dynasty, from 1206 until 1368, there must have been several tens of thousands in all, very probably well over a hundred thousand. The names of only a small minority of these have been recorded. Usually it is only those who additionally achieved some higher rank or distinction whose names are known today. It would not invalidate Marco's claims, therefore, if he were not mentioned in any record of the period.

There is, in fact, an entry in the official history of the Yuan dynasty that may relate to Marco, if only indirectly. In the annals for the end of 1286 or early 1287, there is a brief entry stating that: 'Tachaer [and] Hunan were ordered to go on an embassy to Arghun' (YS: benji 14, 198). The *New History of the Yuan Dynasty* adds nothing to this sparse information (XYS:

benji 11, 119). It is not entirely clear whether the names refer to two people or one. Arghun's wife died early in April 1286 (MP/Yule-Cordier: i, 33n). It is likely that the embassy which he sent to Khubilai to request another wife from the same Mongol tribe, if it travelled overland from Persia, might have arrived late the same year. This command to act as ambassador(s) to Arghun probably refers to the appointment of those who, on behalf of the Great Khan, would accompany the new wife back to Persia. The long delay before the departure of the Princess, in 1292 (from Quanzhou: possibly 1291 from Khanbalikh), can be explained, first, by the time needed to select a suitable bride and, secondly, by the difficulty regarding the route of the journey. According to Ramusio's version of the book, the Princess and her escort actually set out to travel by land, but were forced to turn back by warfare on the route (MP/Latham: 42; MP/Hambis: 62; MP/Marsden: 24–5). If this is true, then more than a year may have been wasted by this false start alone. It is also possible that there may be a mistake in the official history here and that the entry should have been placed somewhat later. Might Marco's Mongol name appear in this entry? This is perhaps not impossible, though it unfortunately seems unlikely, for the book states that the Polos were only added to the entourage of the Princess after it had been decided that she should travel by sea (MP/Latham: 43; MP/Hambis: 62).

It has very commonly been said that Marco exaggerates in his descriptions of the Yuan empire and other places. This is only partly true. Frequently, his account is entirely accurate. For example, the number of 12,000 keshigten that he gives must be extremely close to the actual number, which is known to have been between 10,000 and 14,000. He does not exaggerate the size of Khanbalikh. His description of Hangzhou is very largely confirmed by Chinese sources. Where obvious exaggerations do occur, it is usually very likely that they reflect information that had been given to Marco by others, rather than his own tendency to overstatement. Thus, the very high figure that he gives for the number of bridges in Hangzhou was most probably a number that had been quoted to him, not his own estimate (MP/Latham: 214; MP/Hambis: 356). It is typical of the hyperbole of Chinese descriptions of places, in which large round figures such as 'wan' (ten thousand) are commonly prominent. Marco surely cannot have made any attempt to count all the bridges in Hangzhou personally. It may be noted that Odoric of Pordenone gives a similar figure, and that he says that he did count many of the bridges himself (Komroff (ed.) 1928: 238–9)! What Marco says about Japan, with its golden palaces and so on (MP/Latham: 244; MP/Hambis: 397), must also reflect what he had been told. Such exaggerations were, of course, rarely meant to be taken absolutely literally, and it is unlikely that contemporary Europeans would have done so. Far harder for them to accept would have been Marco's, generally accurate, account of the wealth, magnificence and benevolence of the Great Khan, a non-Christian ruler at the head of a greater and richer empire than anyone in Europe could possibly have imagined at the time. It required a considerable adjustment in the

European view of the world, and of the position of Europe in the world, to accept Marco's description of the Yuan empire. Perhaps his claim that the Khan wanted to become a Christian (MP/Latham: 119–20; MP/Hambis: 205–6) was a palliative designed to make his account more acceptable. He must quickly have found, after his return to Europe, that some of what he had to say about the Far East was very difficult for many Europeans to accept.

If Marco had wished to exaggerate wildly, whether in relation to his own position in the empire of the Great Khan, or in his description of the East, he could very easily have done so. How many people in Europe at the time could have contradicted him, whatever he had put in his book? Apart from his father and uncle, there were very few indeed who had travelled so extensively, or spent so long, in the eastern half of Asia. His relatives might have been persuaded not to expose any false claims, so as not to shame the family. If Marco had wanted to lie, to invent for himself a false position as an important servant of Khubilai Khan, a life of glory in the Far East, then he could have said virtually anything he wanted. There was no reason at all for him to try to be more than minimally accurate, to include just enough truth in his story to make it more or less credible. The fact that most of his account is, on the contrary, demonstrably truthful and correct is a very strong argument in favour of Marco's general veracity. He was far more truthful than he needed to be.

Again, if Marco had invented the whole story of his journey to the East and his sojourn in the empire of Khubilai Khan, it is extremely unlikely that he could have avoided making numerous obvious mistakes. In particular, if he had obtained his information at second hand, without ever visiting China, then it would surely have been almost impossible for him to have avoided glaring anachronisms. It would have taken time to amass such a volume of information, much of which might well have been out of date by the time it reached Marco. If his information had come from more than one source, then it would probably have related to somewhat different periods of time which, without any personal knowledge of the true situation, he could not have reconciled successfully. It is very striking, however, that Marco's accounts of his journeys and of the Yuan empire are exactly right for the period. It has already been pointed out several times in this book that Marco shows accurate knowledge of events and situations that came to pass at exactly the time that he was in the Far East, sometimes only a few years before his return to Venice. It is extremely unlikely that he could have obtained such correct and up-to-date information except by personal observation. Some one and a half centuries after Marco's time, Nicolò de' Conti travelled at least as far to the east as Myanmar. Yet the information that he was able to collect about China was minimal and highly inaccurate. Although the Mongols had been driven from China more than half a century earlier, he stated that the ruler of Cathay was 'the Great Khan'. He seems to have had some vague information about the change of capital city to Nanjing

during the early Ming dynasty, but still called the chief city 'Cambalec' (Poggio and Ludovico 1963: 17–18). If this is typical of what could be discovered about China from as near as South-east Asia, then it would surely have been impossible for Marco to have obtained so much correct information except through actually being there.

Nicolò de' Conti was only able to make his extensive journeys to India and beyond by travelling as a Muslim. Not very long after Marco's return to Europe, direct contact between East and West began to become very much more difficult. Islam had received a great setback at the hands of the Mongols, particularly as a result of the destruction of the Caliphate in Baghdad and the conquest of Persia. The early Il-Khans had favoured Buddhism but tolerated religious diversity. Nestorian and, to a lesser extent, Jacobite Christianity had flourished in their realms. Ghazan, who became Il-Khan in 1295, was a convert to Islam and reimposed its dominance in the region. During his reign, Buddhism was driven out of Persia and Christianity went into decline (Morgan 1986: 158–60). Not long afterwards, in 1313, the Khanate of the Golden Horde, where Islamic influence had been strong for several decades, also became officially Muslim (Morgan 1986: 143–4). The Islamic barrier between Europe and the East became more or less complete. It became increasingly dangerous for Christians to venture beyond the eastern end of the Mediterranean. By the middle of the fourteenth century, all regular direct contact between West and East was broken. The rise of Timur or Tamerlane in the late fourteenth century intensified the process (Larner 1999: 119). The Italian city states, which had flourished because of their domination of European trade with Asia, were badly affected and began to go into decline. Seeking a way around the Islamic domination of the Asian trade, it was the nations of the Atlantic seaboard of Europe that rose to replace Venice and Genoa. The Portuguese rounded the southern tip of Africa and penetrated the Indian Ocean by 1500. They first reached the Chinese coast in 1514. A little later, the Dutch and the English followed their lead. By then, however, China was a different place, no longer under Mongol domination. Marco's experiences could not be repeated.

In judging the accuracy of Marco's account, it must always be borne in mind that none of the surviving manuscripts of his book seem in any sense to be 'original'. All have passed through the hands of copyists and, very often, also of translators (Larner 1999: 109). All are quite clearly, to at least some extent, corrupt. Errors in the text may have originated in a variety of ways. Marco himself may have made mistakes. Rustichello may have compounded these, adding further errors of his own. It is possible that he may sometimes have misunderstood what Marco told him. If Marco found it difficult to read the Franco-Italian text written down by Rustichello, he may not have been able to recognize all such early flaws. When the text came to be copied and translated by others, however, the possibility of the introduction of many further inaccuracies and errors grew tremendously. It was quite normal for scribes of the period to 'improve' upon the texts that

they copied by making deletions and additions. John of Plano Carpini included a plea near the end of his *History of the Mongols*, begging 'all those who read the foregoing account not to cut out or add anything' (Dawson (ed.) 1955: 71). Translators were even more liable than copyists to make major changes. The Latin version of Marco's book prepared by Francesco Pipino is an instructive example. He did not hesitate to delete passages that he disliked and to make additions whenever he felt like doing so. Usually, this involved inserting abuse of Muslims or adherents of other non-Christian religions, which is generally conspicuously absent from versions closer to Marco's original intentions (Larner 1999: 76, 104, 113–14). It can be assumed that, where there are errors and inaccuracies in the book, the great majority originated with copyists and translators, not with Marco.

The 'original' version of the book may not have been written in a single language. It is perfectly possible that the language of the text was a mixture of Franco-Italian and another language, most probably Venetian. After the first version of the book had been written by Rustichello, in Franco-Italian, according to what Marco had recounted to him, Marco may have begun making additions to it himself. These may well not have been in the same language that Rustichello had used. It is very possible that Marco had no more than a rather poor knowledge of French. Probably it would have been much easier for him to write in his own native tongue, Venetian. It is also possible that other, more or less equally authentic, versions of the text existed in other languages. Marco is known to have been questioned by such learned scholars as Pietro d'Abano of the University of Padua (Larner 1999: 44). It is quite possible, or even likely, that other Italian scholars may have discussed an early version of the book with him and made extensive additions to it. This may be how the longer versions of the text (the Toledo manuscript and the manuscript from which Ramusio produced his printed edition) came into existence (Critchley 1993: 173–7). It is even possible that the original language of such extended versions of the book was Latin. This was, of course, the scholarly language of the time in Europe. Perhaps some scholar, who had spent time discussing the book with Marco, translated into Latin Rustichello's text (including, possibly, some additions already inserted by Marco himself), adding considerable extra material that was never written down in any language other than Latin. It is a fact that the Toledo manuscript is in Latin and that Ramusio claimed that the (now lost) manuscript from which he produced his edition of the text was in Latin (Larner 1999: 58; Wood 1995: 45; MP/Latham: 25). It may, therefore, be virtually meaningless to try to ascertain what was the 'original' language of the text. There may well have been no single, 'original' version of the book. Marco was, of course, never engaged in preparing a 'final' version for publication. What probably happened was that, working with Rustichello, he produced an initial, rather short, text. This contained only a modest part of Marco's knowledge. Subsequently, Marco made additions to this first version, either personally or working with assistance. These additions may have been

in a different language from that initially used by Rustichello. At various times, copies of the book were made and distributed. It was naturally the earlier, and less complete, versions of the text that were copied first and thus tended to become the most current. In any case, Marco may not have wished the fullest versions to become widely distributed, as they perhaps contained things that he (or his family) did not feel that it was advisable to broadcast. Thus, the longest texts have survived in only a couple of versions, while there are numerous extant manuscripts of shorter variants.

Overall, despite various inaccuracies and mistakes, Marco Polo's account is remarkable for being absolutely consistent with his claims. There seem to be no detectable anachronisms in his book and very few serious geographical errors. His account of his return journey with his father and uncle, accompanying a Mongol Princess from China to Persia, has quite recently been proved to show knowledge of events that he could scarcely have known about except through personal involvement. Many scholars believe that this is more or less conclusive proof of his story. On balance, it is very much more likely that Marco Polo did indeed go to China than that he did not. It is also likely that he spoke at least a little Chinese (which has almost invariably been thought not to have been the case by previous editors and annotators), though he may well not have been able to read or write Chinese characters. Parts of Marco's book are confused and confusing, parts are inaccurate, parts are exaggerated. No definite reference can be found to any of the Polos in Chinese or Mongol sources. Marco seems not to have noticed some things that we might perhaps expect him to have seen. It would, however, be a serious mistake to judge the book from an exclusively modern point of view and unreasonable to demand of a merchant's son of modest education an erudite and exacting approach to what he saw. Marco is in some ways apparently strikingly 'modern' in outlook. He takes a relaxed and tolerant attitude towards different religions, for example, and talks of polygamy and the Mongol custom of sons marrying the wives of their dead fathers without a hint of condemnation. This is perhaps deceptive. It should not lead to him being judged in an anachronistic fashion. Such attitudes had been acquired from the Mongols and, perhaps only indirectly, from the Chinese. The latter, at least, were in many ways far in advance of contemporary Europeans at this period. By the time he returned to Venice, Marco had spent longer in Asia than in Europe. He had clearly become deeply 'Mongolized', displaying profound loyalty to Khubilai Khan and always favouring the Mongol point of view. Unlike other European visitors to Mongolia and China at about the same period, he became, in a sense, an 'insider'. Although probably not accepted into Chinese society, he became part of the conquering elite, at least as much at home in Cathay, Mangi and other parts of the empire as were the Mongols themselves. His account is a remarkable record of an extraordinary period in Far Eastern history. It is much more substantial than the accounts of other European and Arab travellers to the Far East at a similar period. The descriptions of their journeys

to Mongolia and China by John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck and Odoric of Pordenone taken all together scarcely equal Marco's book. It helped to stimulate European interest in the world, in the period immediately before the great age of discovery. Marco's book is a remarkable document of great historical value and deserves to be read as much more than a curiosity.

It has been suggested that Marco's life after his return to Venice was 'a story which ended well' (MP/Hambis: 13). There must be some doubt about this, however. More plausibly, it has also been said that it 'gives off an air of the humdrum' (Larner 1999: 44). Venice must have seemed dull indeed after the magnificence of the court of Khubilai Khan. Marco had probably enjoyed a good life in China, with a position of honour at the Khan's court. He was sent on interesting and exciting assignments, involving travel to many different regions, and probably well rewarded, not only with wealth but perhaps also with a beautiful Mongol wife. Back in Venice, it is very likely that he felt considerable regret at leaving China and great nostalgia for everything that he had left behind. There is perhaps a hint of this in his comments on the 'young ladies of the province of Cathay', who, he says (no doubt thinking of the behaviour of Italian women), 'do not frisk and frolic and dance or fly into a pet', or gossip, flirt and behave badly in various other ways (MP/Latham: 196; MP/Hambis: 328). He also has nothing but praise for Mongol women. In some versions of the text, he specifically compares their virtues very favourably with the infidelity of Christian women (MP/Latham: 98; MP/Hambis: 165). Having acquired, after his return to Venice, a wife and three daughters, he may well have had good reason to make such rueful comparisons between the women of Europe and those of the East. The numerous articles acquired in Asia that he kept until his death (Wood 1995: 129–30; Olschki 1960: 105–6) are also suggestive of feelings of nostalgia. His later life was probably rather sad, filled with regret and longing for what he had left behind in the empire of the Great Khan. The book was a way to preserve his memories, to hold on, in a way, to what he had lost. It continues to be a compelling record of an extraordinary life.

Notes

1 China before the Mongol conquest

1 See, for example, Dawson (1972), in which Chapter 3 is entitled 'The Five Dynasties period and the Sung Dynasty'. The Jin dynasty is not mentioned in any chapter heading. The *Cambridge History of China* devotes a complete volume to the Song dynasty alone (not yet published), while the Five Dynasties, with the Khitan (Liao), Jurchen (Jin) and Mongol (Yuan) dynasties and the Xi Xia kingdom, are covered by another single volume (Franke and Twitchett (eds) 1994). The Song empire lasted for some 320 years, while from the beginning of the Five Dynasties period to the end of the Yuan dynasty is almost half as long again.
2 There is disagreement about the reading of the Chinese character transliterated 'bo' or 'fan': see Dunnell (1996): 210.
3 A good, fairly brief, account of the history of Beijing and the area around it at this period is included in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Cao Zixi (ed.) (1990).

2 The Mongols and their conquests

1 At least one source gives 1228 (Christian 1998: 404–5, 408 note 77), but the detailed Chinese records make this seem very unlikely.
2 According to Serruys (1955), 172–3, Huihui may have been used to designate Khwarazmians (whether Muslims or not) rather than being generally applied to all Muslims.
3 Petech clearly failed to realize that 'Jiandu' was the name of a people (and the area where they lived) and translates it as 'establish an administrative centre'.

3 The journey and the writing of the book

1 This thought seems to have occurred to at least one other author, who has suggested that Marco may have left a family behind when he departed (Larner 1999: 86).

List of Chinese words and characters

Characters are given in their simplified forms. Characters for authors' names and book titles listed in the bibliography are not repeated here. In accordance with common practice, words are listed in alphabetical order by syllable. Thus, 'Bianjing' appears after 'Bibo'.

A
Abo 阿僰
Achang 阿昌
Adaha [Atahai] 阿达哈
Aguda 阿骨打
Ahema [Ahmad] 阿合马
Alahan [Arakhan] 阿剌罕
Alashan, Ala Shan [Helanshan] 贺兰山
Ani 阿尼
Azhu, Ashu [Ajul] 阿术
Aini 僾尼
Anhui 安徽
Anjizhou 安吉州
Annan 安南
Anqing 安庆
Anxi 安西

B
Ba [river] 坝
Bai [people; river] 白
Bai Man 白蛮
Bai yan 百眼
Bai Yang 白羊
Baili Xi 百里奚
Bairin Left Banner 巴林左旗
Baoding Shan 宝顶山
Baoshan 保山
Baotou 包头
Baoying 宝应
Barkol [Barskul] 巴里坤
Bei Hai 北海

Bei Shan 北山
Beijing 北京
Beiting 北庭
Benji 本纪
Bibo 荜茇, 荜拨
Bianjing 汴京
Bianliang 汴梁
Biao 表
Boerhu [Borghul] 博尔忽
Boertai [Börte, Bortei] 孛儿台
Boerzhu [Boghorchu] 博尔术
Bohai [state; gulf] 渤海

C
Canzheng 参政
Cangzhou 沧州
Chagan Nur [in Inner Mongolia] 查干诺尔
Chagan Nur [on the Hebei–Inner Mongolia border] 察汗淖
Chanyuan 澶渊
Chang Jiang 长江
Chang Ping Cang 常平仓
Chang'an(fu) 长安(府)
Changchun 长春
Changlu 长芦
Changsha 长沙
Changshan 常山
Changting 长汀
Changxing 长兴
Changzhou 常州
Chenxiang 沉香
Chengdu(fu) 成都(府)
Chengxiang 丞相
Chicheng 赤城
Chilaowen [Chormaghun] 赤老温
Chizhou 池州
Chong Er 重耳
Chong Ren [gate] 崇仁
Chongqing 重庆
Chongsheng 崇圣
Chu [state] 楚
Chuzhou 处州
Citong 刺桐

D
Da Fo Si 大佛寺
Da Huang 大黄
Da Jiang 大江
Dada'a'er 答答呵儿
Dadu 大都

Dadu [river] 大渡
Dagu [river] 大沽
Dali [in Shaanxi] 大荔
Dali [in Yunnan] 大理
Daluhuachi [darughachi] 达鲁花赤
Daqing [river] 大清
Datong 大同
Dazu 大足
Dai 傣
Dangxiang (Qiang) 党项(羌)
Dehua 德化
Deshun 德顺
Dezhou 德州
Dian Chi 滇池
Ding [ingot] 锭
Dong jiu 冻酒
Dong Wenbing 董文炳
Dong Zhi [gate] 东直
Dongjing 东京
Dongping(fu) 东平(府)
Du Fu 杜甫
Du Mu 杜牧
Du Zong 度宗
Duhufu 都护府
Duan Siping 段思平
Duan Xingzhi 段兴智
Duanping 端平
Dunhuang 敦煌

E

Echang 峨昌, 莪昌
Ejina 额济纳
Erlangshan 二郎山

F

Fan Wenhu 范文虎
Fancheng 樊城
Fei Tao 肥桃
Feicheng 肥城
Fen [river] 汾
Fengjie 奉节
Fu 府
Fuchun [river] 富春
Fudu 附都
Fujian(lu) 福建(路)
Fulang 拂郎
Fuling(xian) 涪陵(县)
Fuzhou [Fuling] 涪州
Fuzhou [in Fujian province] 福州

G

Ganpu 澉蒲
Gansong (Xiang) 甘松(香)
Gansu 甘肃
Ganzhe 甘蔗
Ganzhou 甘州
Gaochang 高昌
Gaoli [Koryo] 高丽
Gaoliang [river; sorghum] 高粱
Gaoliang Jiang 高良姜
Gaoyou 高邮
Geng 更
Gobi 戈壁
Gongxian 巩县
Gu [river] 沽
Gubeikou 古北口
Gupi 古邳
Guazhou 瓜州
Guan Di Miao 关帝庙
Guanting [reservoir] 官厅
Guangdong 广东
Guangjila [Onggirad, Khonggirat] 光吉剌
Guangxi 广西
Guangyuan(lu) 广元(路)
Guangzhou 广州
Guiding 桂丁
Guilin 桂林
Guipi 桂皮
Guizhou 贵州
Guizi 桂子
Guo [river] 涡
Guo Shoujing 郭守敬
Gyangze 江孜

H

Haba 哈巴
Hami 哈密
Hani 哈尼
Hai He [river] 海河
Hailing Wang 海陵王
Hainan 海南
Han [dynasty; Later, dynasty; Northern, state] 汉
Han [river] 汉
Han ren 汉人
Hanchuan 汉川
Hanyuan 汉源
Hanzhong 汉中
Hanzhou 汉州
Hangzhou 杭州

He Sheng 贺胜
Hebei 河北
Hechuan 合川
Hedong 河东
Hejian(fu) 河间(府)
Helanshan [Alashan] 贺兰山
Henan 河南
Henan Jiangbei 河南江北
Heni 和泥
Hetian 和田
Hexi 河西
Heyang 河阳
Hezhong(fu) 河中(府)
Hezhou 河州
Heilongjiang 黑龙江
Heishui 黑水
Hong He 红河
Hong Jun 洪钧
Honghua 红花
Hongjila [Onggirad, Khonggirat] 弘吉剌
Hou Hai 后海
Houguan 侯官
Hu 户
Hubei 湖北
Hula tang 胡辣汤
Hunan 忽难
Hunan [province] 湖南
Huran 胡髯
Huzhou(lu) 湖州(路)
Hua Lu 花鹿
Huajiao 花椒
Huaxian 华县
Huazhou 华州
Huai [river] 淮
Huai'an(zhou) 淮安(州)
Huaiyin 淮阴
Huanzhou 桓州
Hui [Duke of Jin] 惠
Huihui 回回
Huitong [river; canal] 会通
Huojian 火箭
Huopao 火炮

J

Ji Shui Tan 积水谭
Ji(zi) 麂(子)
Jilin 吉林
Jimsar 吉木萨尔
Ji'nan 济南

Jining(fu) 济宁(府)
Jizhou 济州
Jizhou [river/canal] 济州
Jia Sidao 贾似道
Jiadingfu 嘉定府
Jialing [river] 嘉陵
Jiazhou 嘉州
Jian'ou 建瓯
Jianchang 建昌
Jiandu (Man) 建都(蛮)
Jiandu Ningyuan duhufu 建都宁远都护府
Jianning(fu) 建宁(府)
Jianzhou 建州
Jiang 江
Jiang Fu Gong 降福宫
Jiang-Huai 江淮
Jiangling 将陵
Jiangningfu 江宁府
Jiangshan 江山
Jiangsu 江苏
Jiangtou 江头
Jiangxi 江西
Jiangzhe 江浙
Jiao(lai) [river] 胶(莱)
Jiaozhi Guo 交趾国
Jiaozhou [bay] 胶州
Jin [dynasty] 金
Jin [Later, dynasty; ancient state] 晋
Jin [measure] 斤
Jin Chi 金齿
Jin Shan 金山
Jinci 晋祠
Jinhua 金华
Jinkou [river] 金口
Jinning 晋宁
Jinsha Jiang 金沙江
Jing 京
Jing Shan 景山
Jingdezhen 景德镇
Jinghong 景洪
Jingning 静宁
Jiu 酒
Jiuquan 酒泉
Juyan 居延
Juye 巨野
Juyong(guan) 居庸(关)
Juan 卷
Jun [commandery] 军
Jun [prefecture] 郡

K
Kashi 喀什
Kaifeng 开封
Kaiping(fu) 开平(府)
Kangding 康定
Karlik Tagh 哈尔里克山
Kou 口
Kucha 库车
Kuizhou 夔州
Kunming 昆明

L
Lancang Jiang 澜沧江
Leshan 乐山
Li [measure] 里
Li Cunxu 李存勖
Li Deming 李德明
Li Jiqian 李继迁
Li Quan 李全
Li Tan 李璮
Li Zong 理宗
Lijiang 丽江
Lishui 丽水
Lixian 理县
Lizhou [in western Sichuan] 黎州
Lizhou(lu) [in northern Sichuan] 利州(路)
Lian Hua Chi 莲花池
Liang [measure] 两
Liangzhou 凉州
Liao [dynasty; Western, dynasty] 辽
Liaoning 辽宁
Liaozhou 辽州
Liezhuan 列传
Lin'an 临安
Linfen 临汾
Lintao 临洮
Linxia 临夏
Lingwu 灵武
Lingyan Shan 灵岩山
Lingzhou [in Gansu] 灵州
Lingzhou [in Shandong] 陵州
Liu Bingzhong 刘秉忠
Liu Tianhe 刘天和
Liucheng 留城
Liushou 留守
Liuxian 留县
Longquanxi 龙泉溪
Lop Nur 罗布泊
Lu 路

Lu [river] 潞
Luding 泸定
Lugouqiao 卢沟桥
Lugu 泸沽
Luan [river] 滦
Luobuzhuang 罗布庄
Luoyang 洛阳

M
Ma Lu 马鹿
Manzi 蛮子
Mangwudai [Mangghudai] 芒兀带
Mei Hua Lu 梅花鹿
Meixian 眉县
Meizi 猸子
Meng Gong 孟珙
Mengzhou 孟州
Mian 缅
Min [river] 岷
Minfeng 民丰
Minhou 闽侯
Ming [dynasty] 明
Mingshui 明水
Mogao 莫高
Mohe 靺鞨
Mugua 木瓜
Muhuali [Mukhali] 木华黎
Muli 木里

N
Nasulading [Nasir al-Din] 纳速剌丁
Naxi 纳西
Naiman 乃蛮
Nan Hai 南海
Nan ren 南人
Nanjing 南京
Nantong 南通
Nanzhao 南诏
Nanzheng 南郑
Nangjiadai [Nanggiadai] 囊加歹
Ngoring 鄂陵
Nirang 尼壤
Niya [river] 尼雅
Ningbo 宁波
Ningxia (Hui) 宁夏(回)
Ningyuan(fu) 宁远(府)
Nu Jiang 怒江
Nüzhen 女真

P
Pao 炮, 砲
Pao(zi) 狍(子), 麅(子)
Pimo (Chuan) 媲摩(川)
Pixian 郫县
Pizhou 邳州
Pingyang(fu) 平阳(府)
Pu 濮
Pu Shougeng 蒲寿庚
Pumi 普米
Putonghua 普通话
Puzhou 蒲州

Q
Qaidam 柴达木
Qi [state] 齐
Qilian (Shan) 祁连(山)
Qian Daxin 钱大昕
Qian Hai 前海
Qian Jiang 黔江
Qian Shu Shijia 前蜀世家
Qianhu 千户
Qianhu(fu) 千户(府)
Qianlong 乾隆
Qiantang [river] 钱塘
Qiang 羌
Qiemo 且末
Qiexue 怯薛
Qin [dynasty; state] 秦
Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝
Qinling 秦岭
Qing [dynasty] 清
Qingdao 青岛
Qinghai 青海
Qinglong 青龙
Qingtang 青唐, 青堂
Qingxu 清徐
Qiong Hai 邛海
Qiongdu (Yi) 邛都(夷)
Qiongdu Wang 邛都王
Qionglong Shan 穹窿山
Qiongzhu 筇竹
Qiu Chuji 丘处机
Qusadanna [Kustana] 瞿萨旦那
Quzhou 衢州
Quanzhou 泉州

R
Rencheng 任城
Rou Guizi 肉桂子

Ruo [river] 弱
Ruoqiang 若羌

S
Saidianchi 赛典赤
Sang 桑
Sanggan [river] 桑干
Se Mu 色目
Sha tang 砂糖
Shache 莎车
Shatuo 沙陀
Shazhou 沙州
Shaanxi 陕西
Shan 山
Shan Huan 山貛
Shandian [river] 闪电
Shandong 山东
Shanshan 善阐
Shanxi 山西
Shanyuan 澶渊
Shang [dynasty] 商
Shangdu 上都
Shangjing 上京
Shangqiu 商丘
Shao jiu 烧酒
Shao Yuanping 邵远平
Shaoxing 绍兴
Sheng 省
Shi [measure] 石
Shi Tianze 史天泽
Shi Zong 世宗
Shijiazhuang 石家庄
Shu [Former, kingdom; Later, state; alternative name for Sichuan] 蜀
Shunningfu 顺宁府
Si [river] 泗
Sichuan 四川
Song [dynasty] 宋
Songpan 松潘
Songxi 松溪
Songyangxi 松阳溪
Suqian 宿迁
Suzhou [in Gansu] 肃州
Suzhou [in Jiangsu] 苏州
Sui [dynasty] 隋
Suichang 遂昌
Suodu [Sögätü] 唆都

T
Tachaer 塔叉儿, 塔察儿
Tatatonga 塔塔统阿

Tai Hu 太湖
Tai Huang Tai Hou 太皇太后
Tai Ye Chi 太液池
Tai'an 泰安
Taibai Shan 太白山
Taihang 太行
Taihecheng 太和城
Taiwan 台湾
Taiyuan(fu) 太原(府)
Taizhou 泰州
Tang [dynasty; Later, dynasty] 唐
Tengchong 腾冲
Tian Shan 天山
Tiande 天德
Tianjin 天津
Tianmu Shan 天目山
Tianping Shan 天平山
Tingzhou 汀州
Tong [oil] 桐
Tonghui [river/canal] 通惠
Tonglu 桐庐
Tongzhou [in Jiangsu] 通州
Tongzhou [in Shaanxi] 同州
Tongzhou [near Beijing] 通州
Tu Chenxiang 土沉香
Tu Da Huang 土大黄
Tu Honghua 土红花
Tu Hongshan 土红山
Tufan, Tubo 吐蕃
Tulaman 秃剌蛮
Tulaoman 土老蛮, 秃老蛮
Tuliaoman 土僚蛮
Turfan, Turpan 吐鲁番

U
Urad 乌拉特

W
Wan 万
Wanhu(fu) 万户(府)
Wang 王
Wang Anshi 王安石
Wang Huizu 汪辉祖
Wang Jian 王建
Wang Khan 王可汗
Wang Zhu 王著
Wangjila [Onggirad, Khonggirat] 王吉剌
Wei [river] 渭
Wei He [river] 卫河

Wei Huixia 魏辉霞
Wei Yuan 魏源
Weifang 潍坊
Wen [river] 汶
Wenshan 文山
Wenzhou 温州
Wengjila [Onggirad, Khonggirat] 翁吉剌
Woni 窝泥
Wu Jiang 乌江
Wu Man 乌蛮
Wu Yue [state] 吴越
Wuguji 乌骨鸡
Wuhan 武汉
Wuji 乌鸡
Wujiang 吴江
Wulianghetai [Uriangkhadai] 兀良合台
Wutou 乌头
Wuwei 武威
Wuxi 无锡
Wuxi Jiang 乌溪江
Wuxing 吴兴
Wuzhou 婺州

X

Xi Hai 西海
Xi Xia 西夏
Xi'an 西安
Xichang 西昌
Xifan 西蕃
Xihai 西海
Xijing 西京
Xijing Datongfu 西京大同府
Xiliangfu 西凉府
Xining(zhou) 西宁(州)
Xiping 西平
Xishuangbanna 西双版纳
Xiyang tang 西洋糖
Xizhou 熙州
Xia 夏
Xiaguan 下关
Xiamaya 下马崖
Xian 县
Xiangfan 襄樊
Xiangyang(fu) 襄阳(府)
Xiezhou 解州
Xinjiang 新疆
Xinzhou matou 新州码头
Xingxingxia 星星峡
Xingzai(suo) 行在(所)

Xuzhou 徐州
Xuandefu 宣德府
Xuandezhou 宣德州
Xuanhua 宣化
Xuanningfu 宣宁府

Y
Ya'an 雅安
Yachi 押赤, 鸭赤, 鸭池
Yazhou 雅州
Yan Dang Xue Li 雁荡雪梨
Yanjing 燕京
Yanshanfu 燕山府
Yang Guifei 杨贵妃
Yangzhou 扬州
Ye Niu 野牛
Yelü Chucai 耶律楚才
Yelü Dashi 耶律大石
Yi 彝
Yibin 宜宾
Yichang 宜昌
Yichangjun 益昌郡
Yidu 益都
Yijinailu 亦集乃路
Yizheng 仪征
Yizhou 益州
Yin Shan 阴山
Yinchang 银场
Yinchuan 银川
Ying [river] 颖
Yingguo Gong 瀛国公
Yongchang 永昌
Yongchang Wang 永昌王
Yongding [river] 永定
Yongle 永乐
Yongning 永宁
You Huan 鼬獾
Youzhou 幽州
Yu [state] 虞
Yulong 玉龙
Yutian 于田
Yuan [dynasty] 元
Yuan Shi Ben Zheng 元史本证
Yuan Shi Gao 元史稿
Yuan Shi Lei Bian 元史类编
Yuan Shi Shizu Biao 元史氏族表
Yuan Shi Xin Bian 元史新编
Yuan Shi Yiwen Zhengbu 元史译文证补
Yuan Shi Yiwen Zhi 元史艺文志

Yuanhao 元昊
Yunnan 云南
Yunnan Wang 云南王
Yunyan He 运盐河
Yunzhou 云州

Z

Zao tang 造糖
Zao bai tang 造白糖
Zaozhuang 枣庄
Zhancheng 占城
Zhang 樟
Zhang [measure] 丈
Zhang Lin 张林
Zhangji 章吉
Zhangye 张掖
Zhao Kuangyin 赵匡胤
Zhejiang 浙江
Zhen 镇
Zhen Zong 真宗
Zhendingfu 真定府
Zhenjiang(fu) 镇江(府)
Zhenjin 真金
Zhenzhou 真州
Zhengding 正定
Zhenglanqi 正蓝旗
Zhi 志
Zhiyuan 至元
Zhizi 栀子
Zhong Hai 中海
Zhongdian 中甸
Zhongdu 中都
Zhongjing 中京
Zhongshusheng 中书省
Zhongxin Tai 中心台
Zhongxing 中兴
Zhou 州
Zhou [dynasty; Later, dynasty] 周
Zhou Wang 周王
Zhuoxian 涿县
Zhuozhou 涿州
Zi Diao 紫貂
Zizhi zhou 自治州
Zui Ma Cao 醉马草

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